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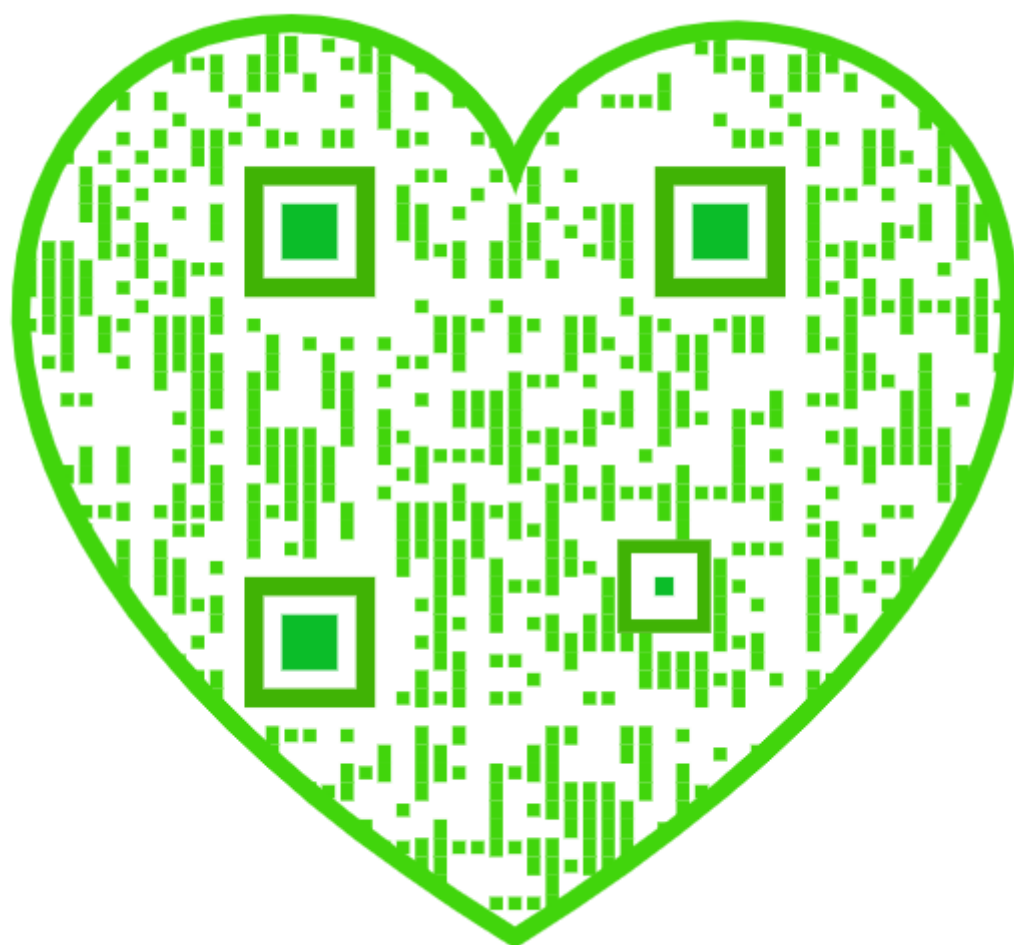
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A man and a woman are standing on a boat, leaning against a metal railing. They are both smiling and looking out over a scenic view of the Amalfi Coast in Italy. The man is wearing a black t-shirt and sunglasses, and the woman is wearing a white shirt over a black top and sunglasses. The background features a steep, green hillside with a small town built into it, and the sea is visible in the foreground.

GREET THE VIEW.

AMALFI COAST, ITALY

Here's to the moment. To the places that give you perspective and the people who change that perspective. The curiosity that leads you to the edge of the earth — and the joy that meets you there. Here's to the ones who dream about discovering the undiscovered. And hear the sway of ocean's song. To disconnecting, reinventing, and having every reason to celebrate. To Finding More.



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An aerial photograph showing a vast vineyard in the foreground, with several modern, low-rise buildings and a parking lot in the middle ground. The background features rolling hills and a distant mountain range under a clear sky.

Victoria's Luxe Vineyard Escape You've Never Heard Of

Marnong Estate, Mickleham, Victoria; a place where you come for the wine and stay for the story.



Just beyond Melbourne's fringe, where the skyline gives way to golden plains and vineyard rows ripple toward the Macedon Ranges, Marnong Estate offers something quietly extraordinary. A destination where heritage meets modern indulgence, it's an invitation to slow down and savour—every view, every plate, every story.

Only 40 minutes from the CBD, Marnong feels a world away. Built on one of the region's earliest pastoral holdings and deeply rooted in Wurundjeri Country, the estate is rich in both history and heart. Time here moves differently. Glasses fill easily, and conversations stretch long into the afternoon.

At the centre of it all is La Vètta, the estate's chef-hatted Italian restaurant. Under the direction of Executive Chef Greg Feck, the menu honours tradition while embracing bold, modern flair. A standout? The Jospier-grilled Angus porterhouse, kissed by charcoal, bursting with smoky depth, and finished with just-picked produce from the estate and surrounds.



From Yellowtail Kingfish with blood orange to a burnt honey parfait paired with olive oil cake and macadamia, every dish is a balance of restraint and celebration—expertly matched with Marnong’s cool-climate wines.

The cellar door is warm, rustic, and refreshingly unpretentious. Fiano, Chardonnay, and a rising-star Sangiovese headline the tastings—each one expressive of the land and made to be lingered over. The hospitality? Effortless and genuine, just like the wine.

And then there’s the golden hour.

“As the sun dips behind the Macedon Ranges, wine in hand and camels in view, you’ll wonder if it gets any better than this.”

It’s a scene that catches you off guard—in the best way. Lounges scattered across the lawn. A view that stretches

for miles. And camels—yes, camels—roaming the lower paddocks, adding a touch of the surreal to the serenity. The Macedon Ranges begin to glow. Conversations soften. The sky puts on a show.

If the day wasn’t enough, staying overnight seals the escape. Choose from restored heritage suites or contemporary vineyard cabins—each one a sanctuary of Scandi-inspired design, luxe textures, and wraparound views. Mornings begin with mist curling over the vines, birdsong rising gently, and the promise of another perfectly unhurried day.

Whether it’s a romantic retreat, a long lunch with friends, or an unforgettable event, Marnong offers more than a reason to leave the city. It offers a story—one that unfolds with every glass, every plate, and every sunset.



MARNONG
ESTATE

MARNONGESTATE.COM.AU

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EMBRACING THE PAST CELEBRATING THE FUTURE

Celebrating 150 Years of Sydney's historic General Post Office, now home to The Fullerton Hotel Sydney.
Be sure to check @FullertonHotelSydney on Instagram for the latest celebrations.



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Location: Kakadu National Park, NT
Credit: Tourism NT/@helloemilie

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers should be advised that this magazine may contain images, names and references to deceased persons.

An aerial photograph of the Great Barrier Reef, showing the vibrant blue and green colors of the coral and the surrounding ocean. The sky is a deep blue with scattered white clouds.

A lifetime this great deserves a lifetime achievement award

You've got to be a pretty incredible individual to win a lifetime achievement award.

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The Great Barrier Reef has been a teacher, a healer, and a provider to First Nations communities for almost ten thousand years. It makes up 10% of global coral reef systems and protects over 9,000 different species, creating one of our most biodiverse ecosystems. It brings millions of people together through sustainable initiatives.

And so we're putting forward this remarkable entity, this natural wonder, for our planet's highest environmental honour. Because the individual who has had the largest impact on the world, is the world's largest individual.

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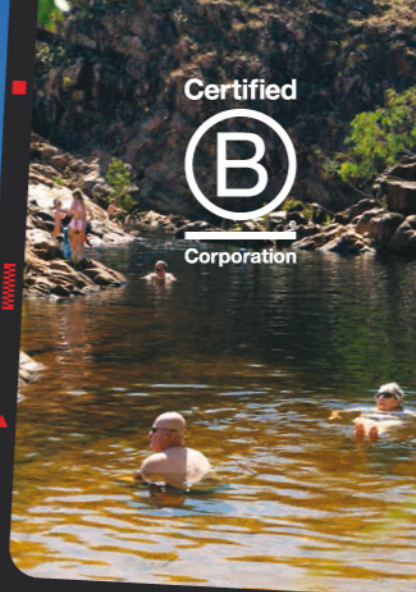


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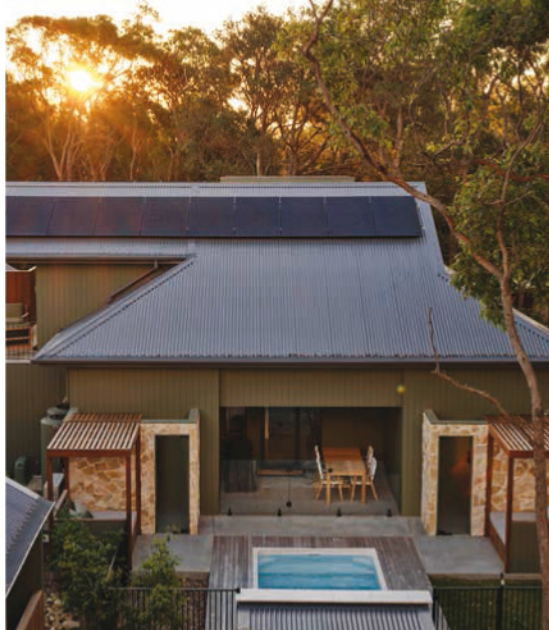


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 **Intrepid**



Editor's letter



WELCOME TO OUR ANNUAL flagship edition of *Australian Traveller*. This year, we have chosen to round up Australia's 100 Greatest Getaways. Because everyone needs to get away from it all sometimes.

A great getaway can be of the truly epic variety: a cross-country train journey, embarking on the Big Lap or even cruising to Antarctica from Australian shores. It can also be perspective shifting, such as a cultural gathering in the outback, or something simply indulgent and fun, like a beachside foodie festival. It can be a slow and restorative holiday in your backyard or the perfect weekend city break.

You'll find all of the above and more in this issue. And whether you're a long-time reader or have picked up the magazine for the first time, I want you to find something new in these pages that you haven't heard of before, as well as be inspired to finally book that trip you've been dreaming about for years.

Perhaps there might be something here that will make you see a destination you know in a fresh light. Whether exploring the creative side of Townsville in North Queensland (page 126), hiking the Snowy Mountains in summer when the snow has melted away (page 134) or joining a new First Nations cultural tour at an iconic Kimberley destination (page 108). Just 90 minutes from Sydney/Warrane, the Central Coast of NSW is a destination I know well, but by checking into Bells at Killcare's luxurious new design-led lodges on a blue-sky winter's weekend last year, I got to appreciate it afresh. I write about it on page 102 and encourage you to all book your own 'coolcation' over the coming months.

Elsewhere in the issue, Chris Ashton shares a local perspective on Lismore (page 74): three years after its devastating floods, this vibrant regional city in NSW's Northern Rivers is on the cusp of a revival, spurred by the reopening of its gallery. Liz Bond checks into the new nature-based Turtle Sands resort at Mon Repos in Queensland's Bundaberg region, where holidaymakers are front row for the famous turtle nesting and hatching (page 70). And, in regional Victoria, Jo Stewart heads to Ballarat, where a dynamic dining scene has been shaped in recent years by the city's multicultural makeup (page 64).

And don't miss your chance to purchase a bundle subscription of *Australian Traveller* and sister title *International Traveller* and receive a bonus *Lonely Planet* book, *Women Travel Solo* (available to first 200 new subscribers). Because there's no such thing as too much wanderlust.

So enjoy the issue and I hope it inspires the greatest of getaways near and far. Happy travels!

Imogen Eveson

IMOGEN EVESON, EDITOR
ieveson@australiantraveller.com



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CLOCKWISE FROM
ABOVE: Enjoy a break at Bells
at Killcare (p102); Join a round-
the-world food tour of Ballarat
(p64); Visit the Snowy Mountains
out of season (p134); Travel
eastbound from Perth/Boorloo
to Sydney/Warrane onboard
the Indian Pacific (p116).



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Australian Traveller Media would like to acknowledge the people of the Eora Nation, Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work, and pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

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80 YEARS SINCE THE END OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR



Photographer unknown, P10364.005

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ONLINE

From a *BATHHOUSE* in Byron to a new hike along the NSW South Coast, your next *GREAT GETAWAY* awaits at australiantraveller.com



AN INSIDER GUIDE TO WHALE-WATCHING SEASON

From May to November each year, more than 40,000 whales slowly migrate along Aussie coastlines to reach warmer waters. Choosing a prime position to spot these magnificent creatures of the deep can be difficult, but our inclusive guide to the best whale-watching locations around the country is your best bet.

The best bathhouse is in Byron Bay

With wellness-based travel on the rise, steamy spas and heavenly hot springs have surged in popularity. But if you're seeking more than just a soothing soak, book into The Byron Bathhouse nestled on the NSW North Coast. As the country's first medical-grade bathhouse, it's inducing some serious zen.



AUSTRALIA'S TOP 10 TOWNS OF 2025

From a dreamy destination in south-west WA to a charming pocket of Victoria's High Country, these underrated Aussie towns have been hiding in plain sight – until now. Wotif has revealed the best places to visit around the country for the upcoming year, with a surprising little nook of NSW taking out the top spot.



The latest hike to hit NSW's South Coast

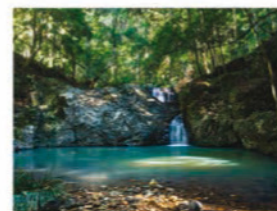
An amalgamation of the South Coast's best walking trails, the recently revealed Southern Headlands Walk stretches 20 kilometres along the picturesque NSW coastline. Whether you do it in a day between two cosy coastal towns or opt for a multi-day hike that hits the region's hidden gems, it's an essential addition to any nature-lover's bucket list.



LET'S GET DIGITAL

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TRAVELLER



NSW's newest hike is a 4-day walk through ancient volcano lands

A new 39 kilometre walk through the lush hinterland of northern NSW is set to breathe new life into the region for nature lovers and cultural travellers alike. Tentatively scheduled to open next week, the walk is poised to become one of Australia's most meaningful and memorable bushwalking experiences.

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The image shows the interior of a tiny cabin. A large window dominates the view, looking out onto a lush green forest and a coastline with mountains in the distance. Inside, there is a bed with orange and grey pillows and a blanket. To the right, there are wooden shelves with books and plants. The walls are made of wood.

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PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

A former postmaster's house in south-east Tasmania/Lutruwita built more than a century ago has been reimagined into a romantic escape for two. Past meets present at the colonial cottage, which sits on a crook of the Carlton River outside Hobart/Nipaluna. The owners have put their own stamp on the lodging, which features the original convict-built walls and rustic timber beams, yet is a haven of contemporary design. Turn to page 34 for more.



WISH YOU WERE HERE

SKYWHALES ACROSS AUSTRALIA

PATRICIA PICCININI'S *Skywhales* will blimp back into view as part of the National Gallery of Australia's new nationwide tour. The hot air balloon sculptures will sail through the big, quiet light of the Australian sky like cartoon animals in formation. One day, they

might be spotted soaring above the golden plains of Northam, WA. Next, the inflatable artworks will fill the cobalt-blue skies over Townsville, Queensland. Don't forget to look up, as this elevated exhibition is all about connecting to community across regional Australia. nga.gov.au



Mildura magic

Following on from his landmark *Field of Light* installation at Uluru and *Light-Towers* at Discovery Resorts – Kings Canyon, British-Australian artist Bruce Munro has launched *Trail of Lights* in Mildura. The installation on Lock Island on the Murray River is made up of two components – *Fireflies*, featuring 12,500 'fireflies' planted in the earth, and *Gone Fishing* – both of which invite visitors to immerse themselves in the magical environment. "Like with all natural landscapes, you get this lovely opportunity to lose yourself and just unwind," says Munro. The meditative installation is expected to attract streams of visitors to the regional Victorian city and will be complemented by a second work from Munro, *Fibre Optic Symphonic Orchestra*, across the river in Wentworth later in the year. mildura.com



TRAVEL BUZZ

What's **NEW** when it comes to *PLANNING* your next trip, from a *LIGHT* installation in Mildura to a **BOLD** masterpiece at the NGA.

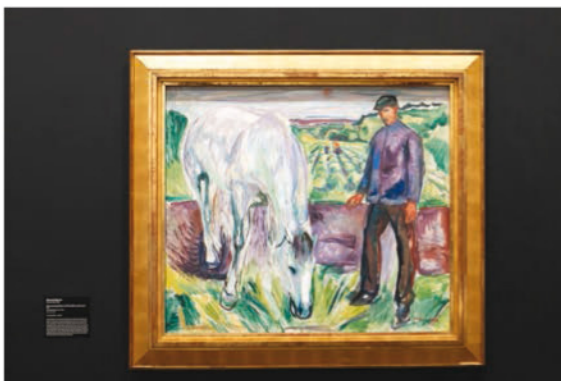


Island idylls

Orpheus Island Lodge and Pelorus Private Island have been added to the Luxury Lodges of Australia collection. The lodges – part of the Morris Escapes group – offer guests the ultimate in barefoot luxury by way of being able to walk off the sand to access the World Heritage-listed Great Barrier Reef. Both the beach-chic villas at Orpheus Island Lodge and generously appointed single residence on Pelorus Private Island are just a short 30-minute helicopter ride from Townsville. luxurylodgesofaustralia.com.au

NGA GIFTED A MASTERPIECE

The National Gallery of Australia in Canberra has been gifted a masterpiece painted by Edvard Munch. The acquisition of *Man with Horse* (1918) by the Norwegian artist, best known for *The Scream* (1893), marks a significant moment for the national collection. Visitors to the NGA will be able to stand before the evocative work thanks to the generosity of committed philanthropist Geoff Ainsworth AM. nga.gov.au



AT LOVES... Ultimate Beaches: Australia by Celeste Mitchell

Celeste Mitchell has spent the past two years toting a towel to beaches around Australia in the name of research. Be it a family-friendly day at Tallebudgera Creek or a soul-nourishing swim at Australia's southernmost beach, *Ultimate Beaches:*

Australia captures the magic of the Australian coastline. Within its pages, expect everything from First Nations history to accessible facilities, patrol info, dog rules, nearby hikes and where to stay. The task of narrowing Australia's best beaches down from 10,000 to just 80 was, says Mitchell, an experience that left her in awe of all we have on our doorstep.

"Being able to swim straight off the beach and snorkel above Ningaloo Reef in WA, share sand with a cassowary in Queensland and watch endless pods of dolphins swimming along the NSW coast are some of the memories that will stick with me most," says Mitchell, a regular contributor to *Australian Traveller*.

And while asking Mitchell to pick a favourite beach is akin to asking her to choose her favourite child, the author says she was completely captivated by the coastline around Esperance. "Even though I visited on the cusp of winter, and I only managed to brave one swim, the scale of natural beauty and absence of crowds really hooked me."

Ultimate Beaches: Australia (Hardie Grant, out 3 June, \$45)

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portstephens.org.au





Cruise the humpback highway

From May to November, Australia's east coast becomes a humpback highway for some 40,000 whales who migrate to warmer waters to breed and calf. Getting up close to these magnificent mammals onboard *K'gari Breeze* is an epic experience. To maximise your chances of a close encounter, Fraser Island Boat Charters has unveiled Australia's only overnight humpback whale charter. Board the private yacht with an experienced skipper and spend one-to-three nights cruising the Fraser Coast, through the UNESCO-listed Great Sandy Strait and Hervey Bay, a Whale Heritage Area, seeking out humpbacks, dolphins and toasting to endless ocean sunsets. The charters can hold up to six people and include catering. fraserislandboatcharters.com.au



HAUTE HOSTELS

YHA Australia has unveiled three of its flagship east coast properties after a major \$9.7 million renovation. YHA Sydney Central, YHA Sydney Harbour and YHA Brisbane City (pictured) have all undergone a glow-up that is in line with the evolution of the hostel experience. While YHA's commitment to affordable accommodation remains, the revitalised guest experience aims to appeal to a broader audience with new high-quality bunks with in-built charging points, bedside lights, generously sized locks and sleek modern bathrooms. yha.com.au

Big-picture thinking

The Eva and Marc Besen Centre is the Yarra Valley's new clubhouse for creatives. The stunning extension of the TarraWarra Museum of Art is a colourful new addition to this pretty patchwork of countryside. The centre, on the Traditional Lands of the Wurundjeri people, spotlights the artworks gifted to the nation by the late Eva Besen AO and Marc Besen AC. It's also a place of learning and inspiration with a roster of exhibitions, educational workshops, talks, lectures, concerts and live art events. twma.com.au



UNPARALLELED EXPERIENCE

Journey Beyond is set to introduce its new luxury suites – Aurora and Australis – from April 2026. The premium rooms onboard *The Ghan*, *Indian Pacific* and *Great Southern* include elevated add-ons such as butler service and in-room dining. The Woods Bagot-designed suites will embody 'luxury in an Australian context', offering passengers a wonderful vantage point of the rolling landscape. journeybeyond.com



PHOTOGRAPHY: JAMES HENRY (TARRAWARRA MUSEUM OF ART)

SILVER LININGS

In need of a circuit breaker? Australians can cruise closer to home onboard Silversea's ultra-luxury *Silver Nova* as it angles its bow northward from the iconic Sydney Harbour Bridge to the vibrant tropical reefs off Cairns/Gimuy. The 10-day East Coast Australia Voyage sails from 18–28 October, pulling into picturesque ports such as Newcastle/Mulooobinba, Brisbane/Meenjin, Mooloolaba and K'gari. Prospective passengers can also opt for the eight-day Northern Australia Voyage between Cairns and Darwin/Garramilla from 28 October to 5 November. silversea.com **A1**



A SUNNY WINTER WONDERLAND

The *UNRIVALLED* landscapes and natural beauty of the Sunshine Coast make it the *PERFECT* destination for a *WINTER* getaway.

Winter brings its own sense of wonder to the Sunshine Coast. This Queensland gem offers a range of vistas, from sparkling golden-sand beaches to lush green hinterlands. You could spend weeks exploring secluded coves and verdant rainforests – but just as vibrant as the region's nature is its culinary offerings.

From food festivals to wildlife spotting, a range of experiences make this a year-round destination for great getaways.

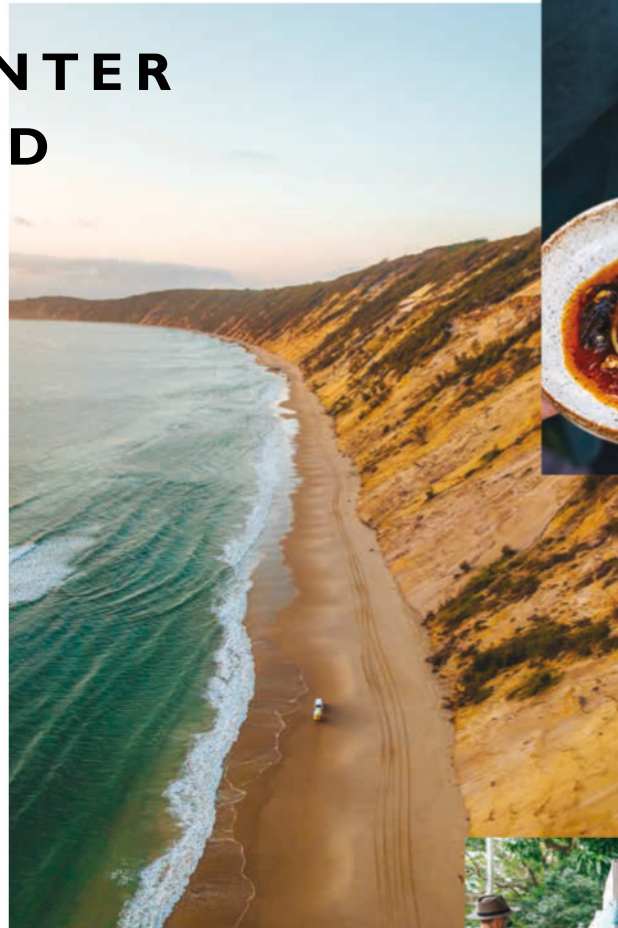
MEMORABLE OCEAN EXPERIENCES

From June to the end of October, coastal waters welcome more than 20,000 humpback whales on their annual migration. Get into the water with these majestic creatures with Sunreef Mooloolaba's Swim With Whales experience.

On land, take the Great Beach Drive to the extraordinary coloured sands of Rainbow Beach and ancient dunes of Carlo Sand Blow. It's the perfect place for sunrise and sunset views, and is across the Great Sandy Strait from Tin Can Bay and Double Island Point.

HIDDEN HINTERLAND SECRETS

Think you know the Sunshine Coast hinterland? Think again. While the atmospheric heritage villages of Maleny, Montville and Mapleton may be on the tourist track, there's also a rich natural playground to explore.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Travel along the Great Beach Drive for extraordinary views at Rainbow Beach; Enjoy the tasty treats of the local foodie scene; Stop for the freshest produce at Eumundi Markets; Explore the Glass House Mountains.

Look for the 'hidden hinterland' by seeking the secret subtropical rainforest pockets in the Glass House Mountains and along the Blackall Range Tourist Drive, a 55-kilometre trip from Landsborough to Nambour.

For the adventurous, the multi-day Sunshine Coast Hinterland Great Walk offers a challenge, while shorter hikes will bring you to stunning cascading waterfalls like Gardners and Kondalilla falls.

THE FRESHEST FOOD AND DRINKS

Open the door of Queensland's Sunshine Pantry and whet your appetite with everything from farm-fresh produce to fine dining. More than 900 producers and makers call this region home, making it a rich and diverse destination for your tastebuds to explore.

A wealth of foodie experiences await: browse the farmers markets dotted throughout the area, stop at farmgate stalls for locally grown fruit and vegetables, savour fresh seafood at fine dining restaurants, and sip gin, rum, vodka or whisky while chatting with their makers at local distilleries.



EXCITING EVENTS IN 2025

With over 100 events lined up for autumn and winter, a feast of festivals from May to August begins with the Horizon Festival (until 11 May). Expect visual art, music, theatre, dance, words, film and creative workshops on show throughout the entire region.

The Curated Plate (25 July – 3 August) is 10 days of glorious gourmet experiences celebrating the Sunshine Coast's food and drink offerings – including an abundance of locally grown produce and fresh seafood. Around 50 events are being planned for the 2025 program, all celebrating the area's diverse range of cuisines, growers, chefs and restaurants.

Read more at visitsunshinecoast.com





Barangaroo banger

The reputation of Annamese as a place to wine and dine has quickly grown since it opened in January. The 98-seat restaurant in Barangaroo flows outdoors onto a terrace overlooking Sydney Harbour. It's led by executive chef Andy Pruksa (ex-Muum Maam) whose menu marries the rich culinary heritage of Vietnam with broader Asian influences. Kick off with a pho cocktail followed by lemongrass chicken skewers, dumplings, and roasted duck and banana blossom salad. annamese.com.au

WINE & DINE

Celebrating the *NEW* and noteworthy, from a BEACH house in Bunker Bay to hidden *GEMS* on the Gold Coast.



JOIN THE CLUB

The signature restaurant at Hamilton Island's new boutique hotel, The Sundays, is to be led by Josh and Julie Niland of Saint Peter at The Grand National Hotel. And while not everything on the menu at Catseye Pool Club contains seafood, there are definite threads that tie the siblings together. Tack towards Eastern rock lobster and hand-line coral trout from the grill before angling for a spot on a sun lounger. The launch of Catseye Pool Club follows The Palms, the island's new garden bar, and the relaunch of much-loved Southeast Asian restaurant coca chu. hamiltonisland.com.au



A certain alchemy

Polenta with duck egg. Nasturtium and green-chilli butter. Green tomato and silverbeet chow-chow. Expect the pages of *A Heide Harvest* to be bursting with colour in this exploration of the rich, artistic and culinary legacy of Victoria's Heide Museum of Modern Art. More than just a cookbook, *A Heide Harvest* brings together art, archival material, history and recipes inspired by the creative spirit of the museum's founders, John and Sunday Reed. (Thames & Hudson Australia, \$64.99)

Near and far

Travellers from distant lands will appreciate the global flavours on offer at OZIN, the inventive new eatery housed in a heritage property in the east end of Adelaide/Tarntanya. Chef Vicky Ratnani has drawn inspiration everywhere from Asia to Mexico while highlighting the region's finest ingredients. That 'think global, act local' outlook is evident in the Nepalese dumplings, beef tacos and slow-cooked lamb with naan. This fresh take on fusion revolves around a charcoal grill, which is the centrepiece of the open kitchen. ozinrestaurant.com.au



Bunker down in WA

The forecast for Western Australia's Margaret River region looks sunny with the opening of newly renovated Ilma Beach House. *Ilma* is the Maltese word for water, which reflects the location of this little pocket of paradise overlooking Bunker Bay on the Naturaliste coastline. The menu at the bright and breezy waterside eatery is also influenced by the location, with seafood-centric options such as the grilled octopus, swordfish carpaccio and crayfish linguine. ilmabeachhouse.com.au

HUNTER VALLEY

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YOUR OFFICIAL GUIDE TO
HUNTER VALLEY WINE COUNTRY
WINECOUNTRY.COM.AU





Stay a Lil' longer

Expect to see a few Perth-onalities strutting their stuff at Lil's Rooftop & Bar in Perth/Boorloo's city centre. Executive chef Mark Zavone has curated an Italo-inspired menu that includes everything from small plates to woodfired pizzas that pair well with local wines, beers, spritzes and cocktails. Linger a lil' longer in the downstairs dining room, or break out your billowy bell-bottoms for Lil's Late Night Disco on Saturdays. lilsrooftopbar.com.au



Rockpool rocks on

It seems every table within earshot is ordering the Wagyu tongue taco and brisket empanadas at Rockpool Lounge. It's likely they've done their homework and trust Colombian-born executive chef Santiago Aristizabal to nail the South American accents. The 50-seater lounge is a sophisticated extension of Rockpool Bar & Grill with all the feels of a fancy supper club. Sit in a puddle of sunshine by the window in the elegant lounge overlooking tree-lined Bligh Street in Sydney/Warrane while sipping on your dirty frozen martini. rockpoolbarandgrill.com.au



RAISE A GLASS

Since its beginnings in gin just over 10 years ago, Sydney/Warrane distilling company Archie Rose has amassed countless awards and matured, quite literally, to whisky. The release of the Single Cask Whisky Series Batch No. 2 – which includes Australia's first native-peat whisky – is, says founder Will Edwards, "a significant marker of its mission to craft authentic, world-class Australian whisky using local malts that push the boundaries of quality, flavour and provenance". archierose.com.au



NORTÉ AND NICE

The team behind both Norté and Sueño on the Gold Coast spent more than five years travelling to hotspots in Mexico, Panama, Peru, Brazil and London to gather inspiration for the two Latin-inspired venues. While Norté's menu is grounded in cooking over coals, the hip Oxley 1823 precinct's highly anticipated rooftop venue Sueño serves elevated bites such as ceviche, skewers and tortillas. The team behind the iconic Rick Shores has curated a 150-odd collection of wine for Norté and hard-to-find tequila and mescal to sweeten the deal at the dreamy Sueño. oxley1823.com.au **AT**





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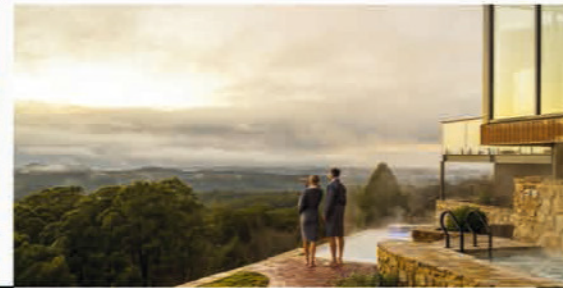
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RIVERFRONT ROMANCE

The weathered convict-brick walls and original timber beams of the 1842-built Post House still contain whispers of its storied heritage. The one-bedroom colonial cottage sits on a crook of the Carlton River, just 40 minutes from Hobart/Nipaluna. Immerse yourself in river life from the comfort of the old postmaster's house, which has been lovingly reimaged with modern comforts as an ideal spot for an elopement or luxury escape. posthouse.com.au

Downtown digs

Adina Town Hall has reopened in Sydney/Warrane's CBD. The apartment-style rooms have soaring ceilings that are evocative of downtown NYC lofts, with kitchens and lounge-style settings designed to be comfortable for an extended stay. The reimaged 144-room Adina apartment hotel is also moments from landmark attractions, making it well placed for business and leisure travellers. tfehotels.com



PILLOW TALK

Check in to CHECK out the latest, *GREATEST* and most fabulous STAYS around Australia this *WINTER*.

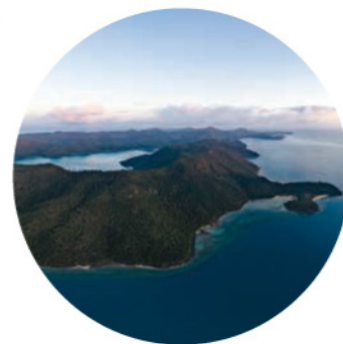


HOWE ON EARTH

Visitors to Lord Howe Island can now detox from the digital world at The Cabin, just steps away from Lagoon Beach. The island's first fully off-grid retreat is powered entirely by solar panels and is a new addition to a heritage-listed property that is owned by sixth-generation islanders. The eco-conscious stay is all about slowing down and immersing in the inherent beauty of the island landscape. thecabin.au

Peppers spices up Gladstone

Peppers Gladstone is the first five-star hotel to open in the Central Queensland region. The experiential 32-room hotel adjoins the existing 60-room Mantra Gladstone at the Yaralla Sports Club as a dual-branded hotel concept from Accor. The hotel has a heated outdoor swimming pool with a bar serving complimentary drinks (during certain hours) and two onsite restaurants for breakfast, lunch and dinner. all.com



Also in the news...

On the book

A world-class luxury eco lodge is set to open on Hook Island (pictured above) in the Whitsundays come 2027. Once completed, the lodge will boast 39 thoughtfully designed biophilic cabins, an elegant open-air arrival pavilion, two distinct dining experiences, forest pools and wellness spaces, all inspired by the island's natural beauty. epochallhotels.com.au

A major player

Minor Hotels has added three contemporary Victorian properties to its Oaks Hotels, Resorts & Suites portfolio. The addition of Oaks Vue Suites Geelong, Oaks R Suites Geelong and Oaks Melbourne Flemington Suites strengthens the presence of the apartment-style accommodation in Victoria. Queen's Wharf Residences is also newly open in Brisbane/Meenjin. minorhotels.com

Right on Kew

Accor has expanded its portfolio of apartment hotels with the addition of The Sebel Melbourne Kew. The property, formerly Hotel 115, is set to undergo an extensive transformation in the lobby and reception area, with plans for rolling renovations of the accommodation to continue. The Sebel Melbourne Kew has 89 hotel rooms and 23 one- and two-bedroom apartments. all.com 

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**ALBA THERMAL SPRINGS & SPA,
MORNINGTON PENINSULA, VIC**

Watch the smouldering embers from the fire pit swirl skywards on the Thyme restaurant terrace after your Bathe & Beluga experience at Alba Thermal Springs & Spa. The indulgent offering includes bumps of caviar combined with a soak in a steamy geothermal pool designed to promote feelings of wellbeing. Relaxation extends beyond the hot springs when you book a stay at one of the hilltop villas or premium rooms, set to open in June. Seize this opportunity for a reboot. albaternalsprings.com.au



PICTURE OF HEALTH

From the wild **BEAUTY** of the Bass Strait to the *HEART* of the Hunter **VALLEY** and Gold Coast **HINTERLAND**, these five wellness retreats make for the *ULTIMATE* reset.



**CHIMES SPA RETREAT,
DENMARK, WA**

Cue that *Relaxing Harp Music* playlist on Spotify so your qi is exuding vitality when you swan into the Chimes Spa Retreat in Denmark. You'll learn how to live a little better during a Chimes Indulgence package that promises an 'escape to tranquillity' in a lavish ocean-view suite. The lodge-style boutique hotel was reimaged as a high-end retreat in 2022 and is wooing guests from all around the world for its approach to wellness escapes. chimes.com.au

**Elysia Wellness Retreat,
Hunter Valley, NSW**

Sit and reflect, in quiet contemplation, on your goals and what you need to tweak to get lasting results at Elysia Wellness Retreat in the Hunter Valley. Whether you're craving a great night's sleep, want to get off the hamster-wheel of your corporate existence or simply teach your mind to bend (not snap) during a meditation or yoga class, the Elysia Experience can be tailored to suit. Achieve clarity and focus during a weekend getaway or bunker down for a holistic week-long program. elysiaretreat.com.au



**Gwinganna Lifestyle Retreat,
Gold Coast, Qld**

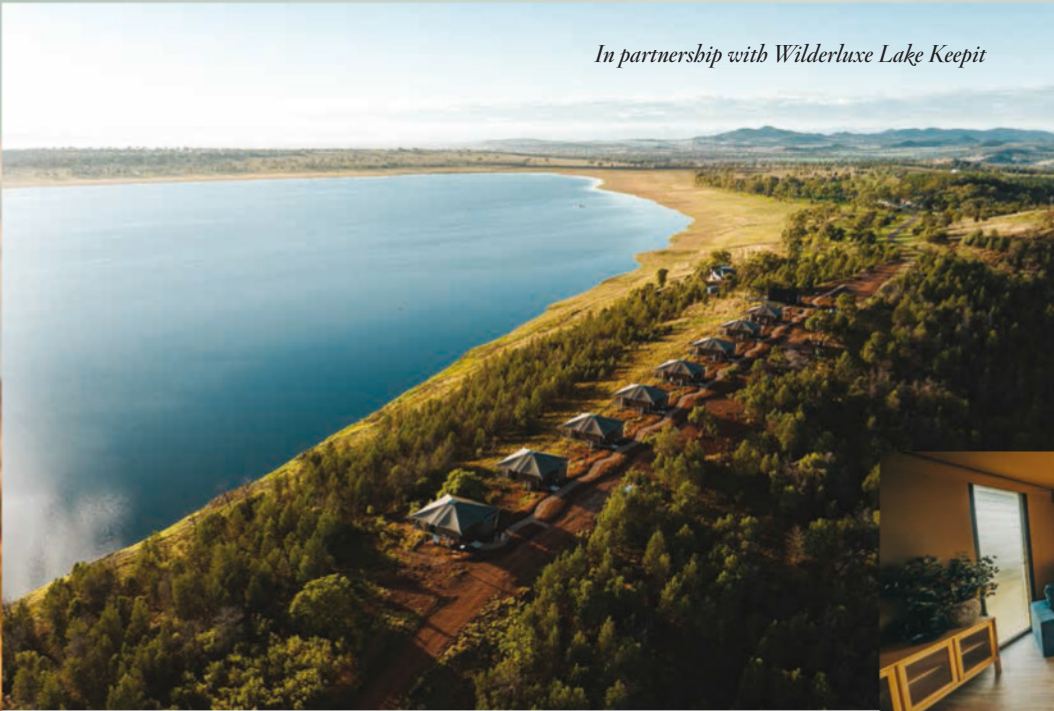
Channel Nicole Kidman in *Nine Perfect Strangers* and waft around in your finest linen at Gwinganna Lifestyle Retreat. Those in favour of a more wholesome weekend on the Gold Coast should head to the hinterland retreat and start the day with a sunrise qigong session and finish with a spa treatment. Sign up for the signature seven-night Ultimate Wellness program or a weekend aimed at women's empowerment. Expect an emphasis on nature, with forest bathing on your doorstep. gwinganna.com



BASS LODGE, KING ISLAND, TAS

Let your thoughts rush in and out with the tide during a stay at the swanky Bass Lodge in Tassie. The island lodge is clad in greenery, with the quiet broken only by the roar of waves rolling in from the Southern Ocean. The four-bedroom retreat offers up to eight guests the opportunity to unwind. Enjoy a cold plunge in the waters of the Bass Strait before slinking into the glass-and-cedar sauna or sunken timber hot tub. The King Island retreat will also stuff your aura with its fireplace, gourmet kitchen and outdoor fire pit. basslodgekingisland.com.au **AT**

In partnership with Wilderlux Lake Keepit



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:
The domed glamping tents of Wilderlux Lake Keepit; Get cosy in your spacious Star Tent; Take in the star-filled view from your private deck.



AUSTRALIA'S NEW LUXURY CAMP

The heavens take centre stage at this *GLAMPING* lodge.

Crane your neck. Look up. If it's night-time in a major Australian city, you might see a faint dusting of stars. Now imagine yourself out in the bush. Here, those stars aren't just scattered dots – instead, they're smudged across the sky in endless, glittering streaks.

Welcome to Wilderlux Lake Keepit, a new glamping lodge in one of the most picturesque corners of outback NSW. Between its eight stargazing tents and shared tales of the night sky, this retreat is designed to exist in harmony with the breathtaking lake and landscape.

Intrigued? Here's what you need to know.

QUINTESSENTIAL AUSTRALIA

Wilderlux Lake Keepit is in the NSW Northern Tablelands, and is just a 40-minute drive from Tamworth. Take a road trip or jump on one of the daily flights to Tamworth.

LAKESIDE LUXURY

Sleep under the cosmos in one of eight domed 'Star Tents', plush in fit-out and extra roomy to provide a snug home away from home. They're all named after Indigenous Sky stories – like Djirri Djirri, the sacred messenger bird, Baiame the Sky Father and great creator and Dhinawan,

the Emu in the Sky constellation. On a clear night, use your tent's retractable roof for stargazing, or wander to the outdoor bathtub on your private deck for a soak under the night sky.

Hit pause on the celestial show and head to Gilay Guest Lounge to relax on the deck overlooking the lake or the outdoor fire pits.



FEAST FOR THE SENSES

'Dinner and a show' hits different with the property's Big Sky dinner experience. Hosted in the Gilay Guest Lounge, enjoy complimentary drinks and a grazing table with the host, followed by a screening of *Big Sky Dreaming*, a film produced exclusively for Wilderlux guests in which Kamilaroi storyteller Uncle Len Waters narrates tales of the Dreaming.

Once your imagination has been fed, it's time to take a seat fireside for a glass of Australian port and a serving of smores.

Keen to explore the wider area? Staff can provide barbecue and picnic hampers stuffed with regional meats, cheeses and organic vegetables.

THE DETAILS

A two-night minimum twin-share accommodation package includes the Big Sky dinner and drinks experience, daily continental breakfast, as well as access to leisure equipment including mountain bikes, kayaks, stand-up paddleboards and fishing gear. Wilderlux is taking bookings now.

Visit wilderlux.com.au

Hats off

OUTBACK hats are one of Australia's most enduring *GARMENTS*. Over the past 150 years, they've carried the DUST, spirit and *STORIES* of a nation.

Myth maker

The cowboy hat and Australian outback hat were invented at roughly the same time on opposite ends of the world. In America, John B. Stetson Company created the cowboy prototype, the 'Boss of the Plains' hat, in 1865. Down Under, Akubra pioneered the classic Aussie outback hat in 1876 from a small workshop in Tasmania/Lutruwita. Akubra designed practical and durable headpieces, similar in style to the cowboy hat, but distinguished by a straighter brim and flatter, lower crown. Whereas the Stetson cowboy hat went on to become a universal symbol, the less-mythologised outback hat endured quietly but just as strongly, becoming a fixture of drovers, workers and style-seekers throughout the ages. John B. Stetson Company ceased operations in the 1970s. But Akubra still lives on as one of Australia's oldest surviving brands, continuing to craft the ever-popular hats today. It's a myth of our own. **AT**

Fashion Akubra, Cattleman **HAT** in fawn, \$320 + Tablelands **HAT** in brown olive, \$320 + Coober Pedy **HAT** in sand, \$350; akubra.com.au R. M. Williams, Bonner dry wax **COAT**, \$499 + Victoria **BOOT**, \$1199 + Script wool **SCARF**, \$149; rmwilliams.com.au Viktoria & Woods, Denim **SHIRT**, \$390; viktoriaandwoods.com.au

Accessories Carl Friedrik, Granville weekend **BAG**, \$1900; carlfriedrik.com Pampa, Porteño Carryall **BAG**, \$345 + **PONCHO** in sand, \$675 + **SCARF** in tobacco, \$320; pampa.com.au **Living** Pampa, Monte **THROW**, \$445; pampa.com.au In Artisan, Mikha rustic **BENCH**, \$790; inartisan.com Archie Rose **TAILORED SINGLE MALT WHISKY**, 700ml, \$159; archierose.com.au

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SHORTCUTS | *Raptor Refuge*

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Refuge founder Craig Webb releases a recovered wedge-tailed eagle into the wild; The Raptor Refuge provides a safe haven for injured birds; Craig with masked owls Barnaby and Montgomery; A young white-bellied sea eagle.

Birds of PRAISE

A REFUGE for birds of prey in Tassie provides *SANCTUARY*, shelter and advocacy for the Apple Isle's majestic RAPTORS, Elizabeth Whitehead finds.

"CHECK OUT THOSE pantaloons," says Craig Webb, gesturing towards 'Mrs Wedgie' as she struts past us, her enormous talons padding across the aviary floor. Standing around one metre tall, Mrs Wedgie the wedge-tailed eagle is the largest bird of prey on the continent, and one of the largest eagles anywhere on Earth. The breeze rustles the fluffy down on her mighty legs, the plumage so dense that it indeed looks like she's wearing a marvellous pair of feathered trousers.

Mrs Wedgie is one of the oldest residents at the Raptor Refuge, perched in the tranquil bushland outside Hobart/Nipaluna. She was rescued almost a decade ago from abuse at a wildlife park, and now shares a spacious aviary with five other 'wedgies', including 'Witchy Poo', who was saved after she was injured in a collision with a powerline. "I call her that because she snatched a broom off me once, and started flying around the aviary with it! Here she comes now," Craig says. Witchy Poo glides past, her three-metre-odd wingspan scooping the air and sending a powerful gust of wind rolling over us. As strong and magnificent as these birds are, they would not survive if they were to be released into the wild.

The best-case scenario for injured birds who come to the refuge is that they can be rewilded after receiving veterinary care and a little TLC from Craig, his son Ziggy and the refuge's small team. But raptors with injuries too severe to fully rehabilitate, like Mrs Wedgie and Witchy Poo, permanently reside

at the Raptor Refuge to live out a "happy and enriched life".

"These birds are ambassadors," Craig says. "They're showing people just how special they are. They're helping their species and they don't even know it."

I'm visiting the Raptor Refuge with luxury travel operator Abercrombie & Kent. The sanctuary is a beneficiary of A&K's philanthropy program, meaning guests get special behind-the-scenes access, like the opportunity to step inside the biggest aviary in the country (more on that later).

Craig has been running the not-for-profit for over two decades, rescuing and rehabilitating all 12 species of raptors in Tasmania/Lutruwita. By sharing the sanctuary with visitors, he hopes to inspire a deeper appreciation for these incredible birds and highlight the broader importance of wildlife conservation.

Craig introduces me to a few more avian ambassadors who reside here. There's masked owl Montgomery who sits stoically on his perch, swivelling his love heart face to and fro. Katie the peregrine falcon is the fastest animal on Earth, and she whizzes around her aviary in a blur of brown. "These little balls of muscle can dive more than 360 kilometres per hour," Craig shares. I meet Hunter the brown falcon, who's learning to eat again after breaking his wrist, nibbling on pieces of meat Craig has shredded for him. Hoot, distinguished by his "John Howard eyebrows", is a tawny

frogmouth recovering from a broken beak, pieced back together with dental glue.

"These birds just stare into your soul," Craig tells me. And sure enough, Hoot regards me with glassy, unblinking eyes like two golden marbles: ancient, knowing, wild.

But the refuge's *pièce de résistance* is the country's largest aviary. Roughly the dimensions of a small apartment block, it's an impressive sight to behold. "The birds need space to fly, to get them fit."

Inside, a lone wedge-tailed eagle flaps about, rebuilding its strength as it tests the air with its wings. There's a perch at the very top of the aviary's exterior, where wild birds, including wedge-tailed eagles, sometimes sit. With any luck, the creature inside will be joining its kin any day soon. **AT**

A traveller's checklist

Getting there

RAPTOR REFUGE is in Kettering, a 30-minute drive from Hobart/Nipaluna.

Staying there

Stay onsite at the self-contained **EAGLE RIDGE RETREAT** cabins, with views of the bushland and Bruny Island.

Playing there

Visit with **ABERCROMBIE & KENT** or book a tour directly with the refuge. Tours must be organised in advance. abercrombiekent.com; raptorrefuge.com.au

PHOTOGRAPHY: BRONWYN SCANLON (JUVENILE EAGLE AND EAGLE TAKING FLIGHT); ELIZABETH WHITEHEAD (REMAINING)



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Destination *unknown*

EMBARKING on an adventure can help one navigate their journey through GRIEF, writes former mental health counsellor and avid *TRAVELLER* Gloria Melham.

THERE IS SOMETHING TO appreciate about the contradictions that grief offers. Quietly immersed in my thoughts, while witnessing the power of the Kiama Blowhole, I felt both the full force of my sadness for the loss of my dear mum and surprisingly liberated from the weight of that grief. While I was already a seasoned traveller, it was at this pivotal moment that I was reminded of the importance of venturing back out into the world. A world that is open to us all if we are willing to explore. It unlocks the door to unknown territory, new adventures and paths less travelled.

Grief permeates through all facets of life. It can be a devastating, isolating and, at times, intense journey. It can touch our life at any moment, and no one escapes the inevitability of the death of a loved one.

The art of travelling can often be an overlooked way of navigating one's grief journey. Whether we are glamping in the Grampians/Gariwerd, sipping a bold shiraz amid the Hunter Valley's vineyards or soaking our weary bones in a spa at a Byron Bay wellness retreat, the length and breadth of travelling throughout our beautiful and vast country is endless.

Typically, travelling has a start and an end date. Grief, on the other hand, doesn't have an end date; rather we just pack and carry it in our luggage in a different way. However, embracing the act of travel can play a significant part in our transformation, ultimately moving us forwards into a new and meaningful life. What that might look like will be different for each of us.

The renewed growth that comes from travelling outweighs the risks of not packing your bags – and it's a risk that can reward you with unexpected benefits. An adventure can be just the balm that soothes life's wounds and can be a powerful and valuable contribution to the processing of one's grief. It can also help in lightening grief's heavy load, allowing us to move towards reconciling and integrating our loss.

I embarked on an adventure of my own, climbing Mt Sonder/Rutjupma in the Northern Territory, and experiencing its breathtaking panoramic views. This was another catalyst for unpacking the layers of my sadness. With each ascending step, I was reminded of my courage, determination and resilience.

Travel not only provides a welcome change of scenery and respite from the depths of your grief, it also gives you the much-

needed headspace to process your feelings, to invite sadness in and to safely be at one with your loss. Emotions are heightened, and our dreams and life as we knew it are revisited. Opportunity for reflection also allows for a change in mindset as you review what is important to you and what you choose to do next.

When we travel, we don't always know what could be around the corner: from unforeseen glitches to unexpected delights. It very much mirrors the grieving process as things come from left of field that are out of our control.

We can be thrown off course from the direction we were comfortably travelling. However, when we stop and reroute, both on our trip and in our grieving, we set a new course to continue our travels. Believe it or not, this loss of bearings and its subsequent discomfort can be an unexpected gift. Stepping out of our comfort zone offers invaluable opportunities to process our loss.

There are different ways to approach your travels. You may contemplate solo travel, which allows for personal reflective space to heal at your own pace; or a group trip, which potentially provides social connection and support.

Retreats can offer salve for the grieving soul; or an interest-focused adventure might see you immersed in the tranquillity of nature or the energy of a music festival. Regardless of which option you choose, grief will be your travelling companion while healing.

Following the death of her husband, my friend and former colleague Gai Pastor found travelling presented many occasions to walk barefoot along endless beaches; she floated buoyantly in the warmth of hot springs; and got caught in the drizzle of a sudden rainforest sun shower. These experiences opened her senses and ultimately her heart, and in doing so, the weight of her grief became lighter. "While I am always going to miss Nick," she reflected, "I am grateful for and in awe of what the world still has on offer."

Travelling can also be cathartic, transformative and offer an altered perspective to your world. After all, in the words of Lucius Annaeus Seneca, a Stoic philosopher of Ancient Rome: "Travel and change of pace impart new vigour to the mind."

The external act of travelling is about the shift in your internal narrative. That exploratory process allows for a coming home to oneself. Now that is the real destination. 



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Cape Byron Lighthouse; Indigenous guide Delta Kay points out bush food and medicine during a Lighthouse Aboriginal Tour; Explore the beaches of bohemian seaside town Byron Bay.

Guiding light

A cultural tour around Byron Bay's famed BEACON unearths a different *PERSPECTIVE*, discovers Kristie Lau-Adams.

DIZZIED WAVES THUD against cliffs as a ravenous osprey mauls a fresh catch. There's even a decent sunset this afternoon, blurring tangerine and Barbie pink across the coastline. But despite the setting, all eyes are glued to Delta Kay, our tour operator, as we follow her on Explore Byron Bay's Lighthouse Aboriginal Tour. Delta is leading

our group of 10 on a 3.7-kilometre loop from Clarkes Beach around Cape Byron Lighthouse. Delta is an Arakwal Bundjalung woman and the daughter of Lynda Vidler, who lodged a successful Native Title claim in 2019. She has undoubtedly inherited her mother's profound connection to Country and streak for advocacy, having been voted into the Byron Shire Council in 2024.

Treading gently, almost tiptoeing, through bushland speckled with Illawarra plum trees, lemon myrtle bushes and midyim berries, Delta dances atop the earth with a subconscious respect for her surroundings. Climbing the Tallow Ridge Track's steep stairs – it single-handedly elevates the tour's fitness rating to moderate – Delta softly ushers native ginger clumps and lilly pillly limbs out of her way. The woman even smiles at bush turkeys, detailing their role in Creation stories while I bury a burning desire to find a stick. Delta cherishes the land that nourishes her and soon, I'm fan-girling for the dewy bushland that envelops me, too.

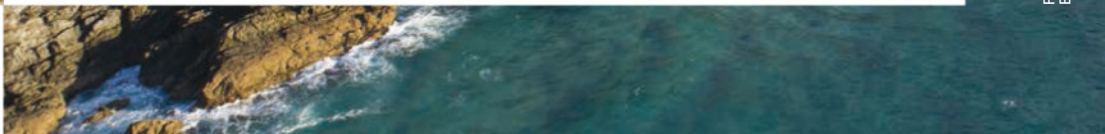
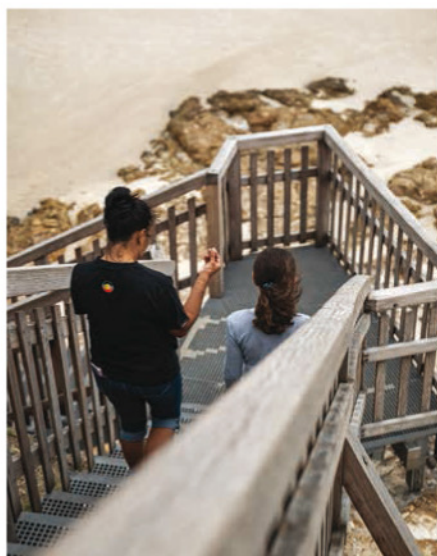
An hour into the walk, we're led to a sealed footpath where Tallow Beach

stretches below. Delta illuminates our perspective with stories from her childhood and recalls playing amid pine trees in Suffolk Park, just beyond the waves rolling onto the sand at Tallow Beach.

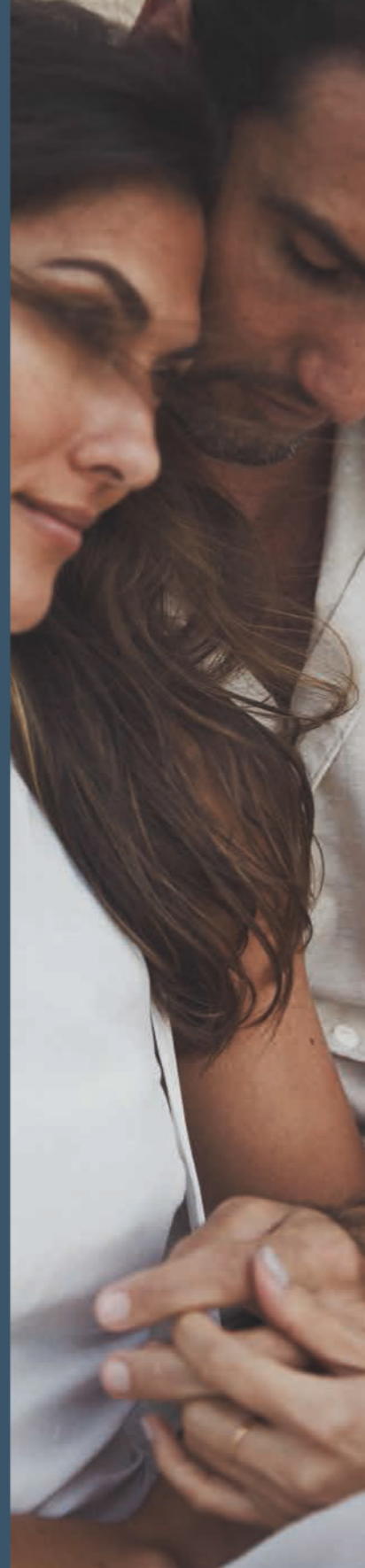
Delta distracts us entirely from Australia's most easterly mainland point, now in proximity, with First Nations stories. And, as we approach Cape Byron Lighthouse and that sunset edges towards oblivion, it's still Delta who blazes our trail. She shares the sacred site's history as a meeting place for Traditional Owners where tales were told and ceremonies cemented community.

A fellow walker bends my ear on the descent to Clarkes Beach. "Reckon that spot we saw, Raes on Wategos, takes walk-ins?" he asks me. Before I tell him it's Friday night and the odds are poor, he points to his wife who is hastily checking her watch: "We have a reservation soon in town, but I've got more questions for Delta." I nod knowingly as a fistful of Warrigal greens, just snatched from a bush by Delta, reaches me – there's no way I'm leaving any time soon, either.

explorebyronbay.com **AT**



PHOTOGRAPHY: DESTINATION NSW (LIGHTHOUSE, COASTAL VIEWS); EXPLORE BYRON BAY/SAM CLARKE PHOTO (REMAINING)



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The SWEET SPOT

On HOLIDAY at Daydream Island Resort & Living Reef in the *WHITSUNDAYS*, Nigel Herbert and FAMILY are kids in a candy store – literally.



OWNING A RESORT in the Whitsundays is hard work: a yin and yang of nature versus developer that many billionaires have dabbled in but few have found financially lucrative. With a long history of transformation, perhaps no other island epitomises this delicate balance more than Daydream Island. Part of the first wave of Great Barrier Reef island resorts, today it has found its groove as a family holiday destination with a point of difference.

First developed in the 1930s, complete with six tin sheds and named after the owners' yacht, it has been variously owned by a succession of developers, most recently changing hands in 2015. Then, in 2017, as predictably as the sun rising in the east, Cyclone Debbie arrived, fast-tracking and significantly increasing the cost of a planned renovation. After a cool \$140-million injection, the new-look Daydream Island Resort was revealed in 2019.

Just a 30-minute ferry ride from the mainland, its 240 rooms and suites have views across



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: *Daydream Island's beach, Lovers Cove; Kayakers exploring near the shore; The resort reopened in 2019 after an extensive redevelopment; Arrive by ferry from the mainland or nearby Hamilton Island; The writer's eight-year-old son Harry in front of the Living Reef; The island oozes tropical vibes; The view from a Serenity Suite balcony; Guests can snorkel in the onsite lagoon.*

tropical gardens and the crystal-clear waters of the Whitsundays; our vista comes complete with palm trees and sun-bleached kangaroos grazing on the lawn.

The showpiece of the rebuild is the Living Reef, a huge free-form coral lagoon that squiggles for 200 metres through the resort. Home to more than 100 species of local marine life, it's where guests can dive into water-based activities such as snorkelling. This is combined with a small but fascinating research centre, an underwater viewing station and a theatre.

Setting Daydream Island apart from other resorts in the Whitsundays, the Living Reef cuts a course through the main building itself. For anyone with young kids, it's an incredible experience to have a buffet breakfast at Graze alongside an enormous fish tank. In fact, it appeals to older kids as well.

My family and I dabble in other activities around the resort: meeting stingrays, AKA the puppies of the sea, and coming up close and personal with sea stars on a guided fish feed in the Living Reef. We paddle around the island in glass-bottom kayaks and gather each evening at Lovers Cove for a sundowner: bubbly for mum and dad, ginger beer for our eight-year-old, Harry.

We dine at Salti Restaurant, which serves up Mediterranean-style food alongside a selection of burgers (think solid family holiday food) and at the more formal Asian fusion restaurant, Infinity. Main courses at either Salti or Infinity will run at around \$30, which for resort food is pretty good value – especially when combined with the resort's 'kids eat free' offer.

Any children reading this article would of course be screaming: "You have forgotten the best dining option of them all!" – and they would be right. Strategically located right near the kids' pool is Cassowary's Candy Store. A smorgasbord of lollies, chips and ice cream, which kids can fill up a cup with and buy by weight. To say this was popular with my son would be an understatement: for the duration of our stay, no visit to the pool is complete without popping in.

Value is where Daydream Island Resort puts its best foot forward. Compared to its more high-end (and buttoned-down) peers elsewhere in the Whitsunday Islands, the accommodation and resort is more accessible, with everything you need for a tropical family holiday. The sweet spot. 

A traveller's checklist

Getting there

Fly into Whitsundays Coast Airport or Great Barrier Reef Airport on Hamilton Island for the 30-minute ferry transfer to Daydream Island.

Staying there

Accommodation at **DAYDREAM ISLAND RESORT & LIVING REEF** starts from \$350 per night. The Kids Eat Free offer is valid until 31 December 2025 for all children aged two to 12 years and includes breakfast at Graze, as well as lunch and dinner at Infinity Restaurant and the new-look Salti Restaurant. daydreamisland.com

Playing there

There are three onsite restaurants and bars, a kids' club and range of activities, from swimming in the resort's pools to snorkelling and rainforest walks.





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1. Mirror Waters of the Gordon River

Given their colour by amber button grass tannins – are as eerie as they are beautiful on **Tassie's Wilderness Icons** tour, with the mirror-like surface only broken by your chariot out to Sarah Island. Early settlers didn't mince their words when they called the treacherous entrance to the river's harbour Hells Gates, something you'll understand when you drift past.

2.



Farm-to-table freshness at Mt. Gnomon

Visit the cutest-sounding town on the planet! Mt. Gnomon Farm is just outside Penguin on your **Tassie's Parks and Nature** itinerary, where fifth-generation farmer Guy Robertson and his family have perfected centuries worth of skills in cider orchards and gardens. Your farm-to-fork lunch amid this lush setting is like Tassie in a fresh and flavourful mouthful.

Disconnect at Iron Creek Bay Farm Estate

Expect seclusion and style while staying on this working farm in Sorell during your **Tassie Getaway**, where you can pick and sample fruits as you wander through 70 hectares of orchards growing cherries, apricots, apples, and grapes. Enjoy relaxing evenings overlooking the vineyard and tasting homegrown Tassie produce that doesn't get much better than this!

3.



4.



Treasures and Tastes at Salamanca Market

From alpaca throws to woodwork, gin to garden-fresh vegetables, pottery, books and buskers, visit Salamanca Market on your **Perfect Tasmania** tour. Discover creative Tassie in a bustling snapshot where you can grab a coffee before navigating more than 300 stalls wedged alongside the precinct's historic sandstone warehouses.

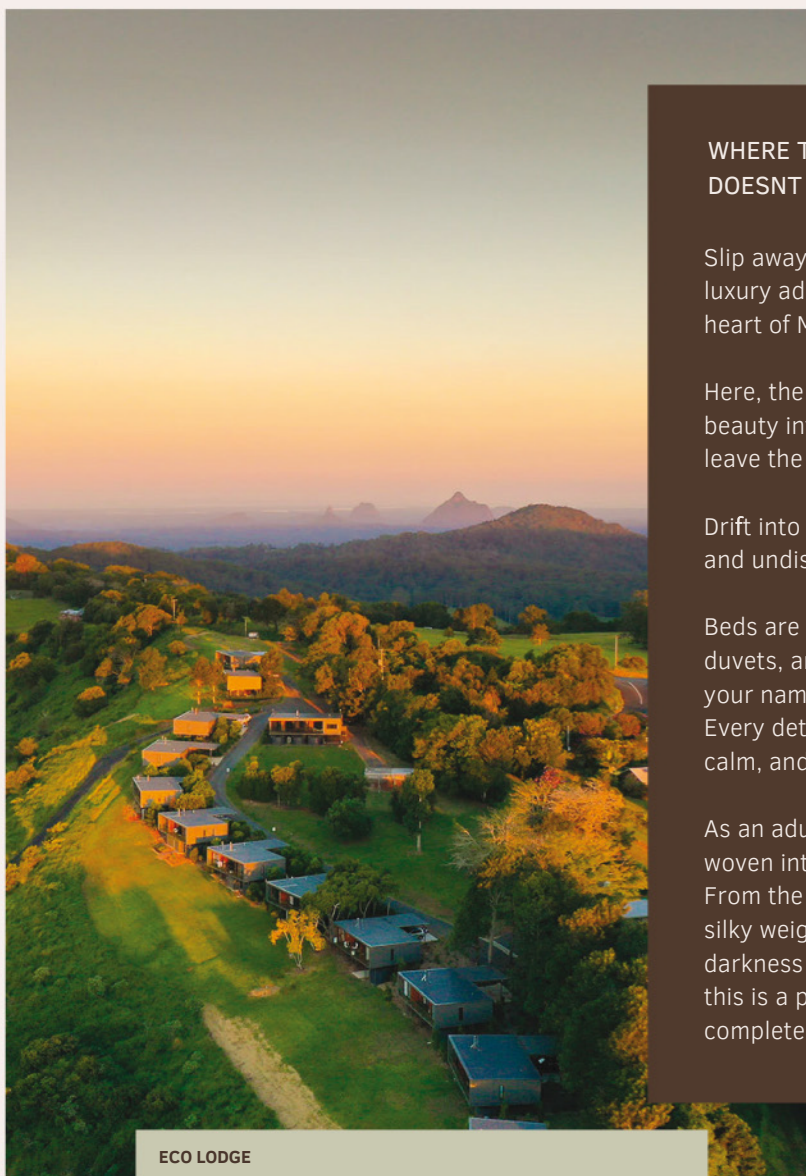
Port Arthur's Haunting Heritage

While the World Heritage-listed Port Arthur Historic Site has a grim convict history, you wouldn't know it today with its rolling green fields and ocean views, best glimpsed on **Tassie's East Coast Highlights** tour with an in-the-know historian who can reveal secrets as you cruise around the Isle of the Dead.

5.



SCANDI AT MALENY



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Beds are dressed in luxe linens, cloud-like duvets, and dreamy mattresses that call your name from the moment you walk in. Every detail has been curated for comfort, calm, and quiet connection.

As an adults-only retreat, harmony was woven into the very first concept of Scandi. From the elegant scent in the room, to the silky weight of the linen, to the gentle darkness that lingers well past sunrise - this is a place to unwind, unburden, and completely let go.

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WEEKENDS

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A DECADE OF HALCYON DAYS

Ten years ago, a former surf motel at Cabarita Beach on NSW's Tweed Coast was transformed into one of the country's most stylish boutique stays. We revisit to see if Halcyon House has stood the test of time. Turn to page 60 for more.





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: *Stilts Dining* boasts sweeping views from the Story Bridge to Kangaroo Point Cliffs; The restaurant has an extensive beverage offering; The new diner is perched on Kangaroo Point Green Bridge, its design a nod to a classic Queenslander; Seafood is a hero, with onsite Moreton Bay bug, oyster and lobster tanks.



Details

STILTS DINING

147E Alice Street, Brisbane City, Qld; stiltsdining.com.au

Verdict: An architectural gem with views to match. The expertise behind the newcomer will ensure it soon finds its best form.

We rated: The bourbon butter-baked oysters, like the setting, made a moreish first impression.

We'd change: Our waitress Camille set the bar high, and it couldn't be matched. There were a handful of service slip-ups – seemingly a breakdown in communication rather than poor individual service. This will, no doubt, improve.

Green credentials: The kitchen is committed to a locally sourced ethos.

Accessibility: Stairs and a lift provide access to the single-level dining room. There is an accessible bathroom and public parking on Alice Street.

FROM ON HIGH

Taking INSPIRATION from a Queensland hallmark, this *BRIDGE*-top newcomer is *ELEVATED* in both senses of the word, finds Kate Symons.

AS A RECENT ADDITION to Brisbane/ Meanjin's population, I have made it a mission to find a unique route each time I duck outside to get my steps up. Not only because I am improving my hometown bearings, but also because I will inevitably get to spot a new (and out-of-financial-reach) dream home. Forget *Selling Sunset* or *Million Dollar Listing*. Give me a sun-drenched Brisbane street flanked with breezy Queenslanders and suddenly I'm a real-estate junkie.

Iconic to the Sunshine State, the 'Queenslander' has plenty of tricks up its (sl)eave for street appeal. Not least of all, its lofty position, having been raised off the ground by stilts.

Opening its doors in February, Stilts Dining is a nod to this distinctively Queensland design, by name and by nature. Perched atop the Kangaroo Point Green Bridge, the riverside restaurant is the latest offering from the Brisbane-based Tassis Group (Massimo, Opa, Longwang, among others).

It is one of two new Tassis venues to adorn the pedestrian bridge, which connects Kangaroo Point and the CBD: Mulga Bill's is a more casual affair on ground level, while Stilts promises five-star dining with views for days, perhaps weeks! Both sit city-side.

There are no bad tables, but I am still chuffed with ours: front row, on the deck, corner position. I need shift only slightly in my chair to catch the Story Bridge, Kangaroo Point Green Bridge,

Kangaroo Point Cliffs and parts of the city skyline in one sweep. Floor-to-ceiling windows mean indoor diners are spoilt too, with a vista that also takes in the Botanic Gardens.

The view from Stilts is quintessentially Queensland and the menu is faithful to the theme. Head chef Dan Hernandez (formerly of Fosh Bar + Restaurant in Hamilton and Restaurant Dan Arnold and Agnes in Fortitude Valley) heroes local produce on a menu that stars premium Angus and Wagyu cuts, all Queensland sourced, and fresh seafood.

There is also a live Moreton Bay bug tank (reportedly a first for Brisbane), the spoils of which can be enjoyed via the bug linguine with bug bisque, smoked over charcoal with saltbush and béarnaise, or with a miso-yuzu glaze, pickled daikon and sesame crumble.

I lean into the seafood selection, starting with bourbon butter-baked oysters (exceptional), scallops with morcilla, corn purée and crispy leek (delicious), and bonito (a little dry), served whole, with a cucumber and goat's feta salad (a salty delight).

Our waiter is Camille and she is on song, offering warmth and necessary details as a rule, and charm and insider intel as a bonus. Later, she handles a service faux pas – no fault of her own – with aplomb.

The drinks menu makes for solid reading. I opt for a Louis Bouillot Blanc de Blancs, a fitting companion to a sparkling lunch. **AT**

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VISIT
SUTHERLANDSHIRE



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: Jillian McInnes and Bob Piechniczek; The menu is inspired by the chefs' Scottish roots; Views towards Marion Bay; Simple interiors let the food and landscape shine.



GAELIC GROWN

The Apple Isle's newest destination DINER brings Scottish Gaelic *GASTRONOMY* to the Tasman Peninsula, says Cassandra Charlick.

WHAT'S IN A NAME? Plenty, especially for a new hospitality venture. My first question on entering the rammed-earth restaurant is "How do I say it?". 'Oirthir' means coastline in Scottish Gaelic, and there's little question why chefs and co-owners Bob Piechniczek and Jillian McInnes chose it. Every seat (all 22 of them) has a 360-degree view of rolling pastures stretching to the cliff-fringed Marion Bay coast in Tasmania/Lutruwita.

The couple fell in love with the island on their honeymoon in 2019, and they jumped at an opportunity to take on the former Van Bone site. Each has clocked more than 20 years in the kitchen, including Michelin-starred gigs, yet this is their first independent venue.

I visit on an autumn afternoon, where stylish and neutral, clean-lined interiors create hygge, with nods to the chefs' Scottish heritage. There's space between diners to feel relaxed, yet not awkwardly sparse. The seven-course menu is elegant and comforting. Service is warm and considered. The result? This is the Scottish/Tasmanian family home you never knew you had, complete with individual cutlery drawers you never knew you needed.

A *faillte* (welcome) plate sets the tone. Piechniczek reaches the table as I slather house-made seaweed butter on woodfired seaweed soda bread. The wooden knife in my hand was hand-crafted by

his father back in Scotland, especially for this dish. Oceanic flavours flow with Tassie golden oysters, sourced from just down the road, on a bed of foraged samphire. It's brilliant with the riesling. The drinks list is succinct, focused and surprisingly accessible. Organised geographically, it starts only Tasmanian and French wines (a nod to the chefs' classic training). A crackle of fish in the pan, the unfurling of wood smoke, and the fulfilled faces of fellow diners offer a hint of what is to come.

In a flash of alchemy, an abundance of zucchini is transmuted into kimchi, offering a subtle fiery kick to the creaminess of Freycinet blue-lip mussels. It's just one example of the kitchen garden's produce. Port Arthur mackerel is perfection, line-caught yesterday. Silken and oily yet in no way fatty or cloying, the melt-in-your-mouth flesh is lifted with gooseberry chutney and a zip of wasabi. Haggis is on the menu, served alongside show-stealing sweet Bangor lamb with the delicate indulgence of a 40-layer potato galette. To finish, a Tassie riff on the Scottish dessert, cranachan – a raspberry sorbet paired with the satisfying crunch of a toffee and buckwheat tuile, washed down with local whisky honey liqueur. Bliss.

Oh, and the answer to my initial question? It's pronounced 'oor-heid', and you'd better get used to saying it. If this dining experience is anything to go by, Oirthir is here to stay. **AT**

All AT reviews are conducted anonymously and our writers pay their own way – so we experience exactly what you would.

Details

OIRTHIR

357 Marion Bay Road,
Bream Creek, Tas;
oirthir.com

Verdict: Destination dining at its best. Local yet worldly, refined yet wholesome, relaxed with a sense of occasion, Oirthir dishes up story and soul.

We rated: A smart and honest union of the chefs' Scottish heritage and the wild, windswept shores of Tasmania/Lutruwita and its passionate producers.

We'd change: The 45-minute drive from Hobart/Nipaluna is scenic but a designated driver is a must, or face a hefty cab charge if not staying locally.

Green credentials: The team grows and forages for as much produce as possible. Other ingredients are mindfully sourced from local farms and producers, with seafood sustainably caught. Waste is minimal and fed back to the kitchen garden's compost.

Accessibility: Oirthir is wheelchair-friendly and all on one level.

Notes: A seven-course set lunch menu is served from Saturday to Monday. A more casual supper is offered fortnightly, Friday to Saturday. Bookings essential.

In partnership with AAT Kings

1

MIMBI CAVES

You wouldn't expect a Great Barrier Reef in the outback, but that's what you'll find at Mimbi Caves. Once part of a 350-million-year-old reef, these caves hold marine fossils, ancient Indigenous rock art and Dreamtime stories shared by a Gooniyandi guide. "That's when the real connection happens – when guests connect not just with the land but with the people who have called it home for tens of thousands of years," says Carolyn, who has taken guests to the caves on AAT Kings' Wonders of the West Coast and Kimberley tour.

2



LAKE ARGYLE

Once vast cattle country, Lake Argyle now sprawls like an inland sea – it's Western Australia's largest freshwater lake, created by the damming of the Ord River. Scattered with over 70 islands, its glassy waters teem with life, and you can cruise across the lake's surface as part of AAT Kings' Untamed Kimberley tour.

For Carolyn, it's a perfect example of how Western Australia's landscapes surprise visitors. "Lake Argyle is a big puddle of water that became a game-changer," she says. "It puts time, isolation and its sheer scale into perspective."

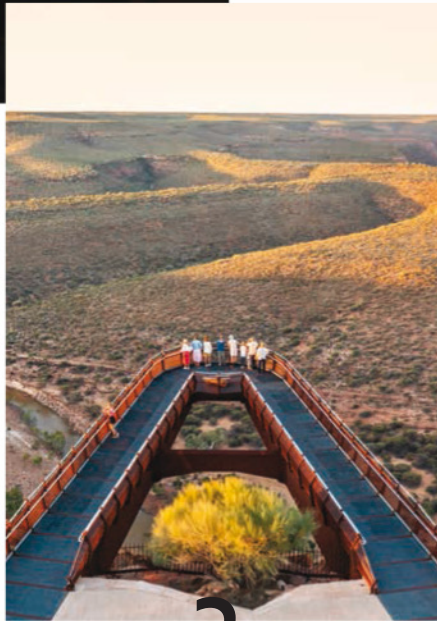
SECRETS OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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"Western Australia is a land of record-breakers," says Carolyn Tipper, a travel director with AAT Kings. "It has the second-longest fault line, second-largest meteorite crater and second-fastest flowing river in the country. It just keeps surprising you and every area has its charm."

Here are four top spots Carolyn recommends for an unforgettable trip.



3

Kalbarri National Park

Nothing prepares you for Kalbarri Skywalk; this 25-metre platform juts out 100 metres above Murchison Gorge and the river below. From July to October, join the AAT Kings Untamed Pilbara and West Coast tour to see over 1000 wildflower species paint the park. Listen as an Indigenous guide shares their uses, as well as explaining bush foods and medicine plants. "I want our guests to have an emotional experience," says Carolyn.

"It's not just about seeing the land, it's about stepping into the stories."

4



HAMELIN BAY WINES

IN THE MARGARET RIVER REGION, EXPLORE WHERE THE INDIAN AND SOUTHERN OCEANS COLLIDE. LIMESTONE CAVES SPRAWL AND KARRI FORESTS TOWER; HERE, NATURE ALMOST DISTRACTS FROM THE WORLD-CLASS CABERNET SAUVIGNON AND CHARDONNAY. OUT OF MORE THAN 100 CELLAR DOORS, AAT KINGS PICKS HAMELIN BAY WINES AS A FAVOURITE. ENJOY SMALL-BATCH WINE TASTINGS AND A GROUP MEAL ON THE WESTERN WONDERLAND TOUR.

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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Heyscape tiny cabins have opened in the dreamy town of Denmark; Forest Hill is the oldest cool-climate vineyard in WA's Great Southern region; Enjoy comforting pub classics such as fish and chips at the Denmark Hotel; Dive right in at Greens Pool, William Bay National Park



HIP HOOD Denmark, WA

Western Australia's Great *SOUTHERN* region generously rewards travellers who make the JOURNEY from Perth/Boorloo with its striking natural *BEAUTY*, heavenly produce and serious WINEMAKING, writes Kirsty Petrides.

WITH ITS ROOTS IN timber and dairy farming, the small coastal town of Denmark on Noongar Boodja (Country) in Western Australia didn't always have a place on a traveller's hit list. Over time though, the town's juxtaposed natural beauty – from pristine beaches to lush verdant forests – began to attract tourists. This, along with the more recent rise of its acclaimed viticulture and the allure of a tranquil tree-change lifestyle, has transformed Denmark into the vibrant and sought-after destination it is today, balancing its historical roots with modern appeal.

With a hip bohemian vibe, the main town of Denmark oozes laid-back likability contrasted with cool self-assurance. On one hand you'll find wholesome health food shops such as The Green Pantry, quirky retailers like crystal shop The Sacred Tree and cosy stores such as Tea House Books, specialising in, yes you guessed it, tea and books.

And, on the other hand, Denmark also happens to be home to a world-class wine industry and indisputably outstanding culinary scene. It's a place where free spirits and first-class food and wine live side by side in perfect harmony.





BARTHOLOMEWS MEADERY

Tucked away in a weathered timber cottage, this rustic meadery feels like stepping into another era. The air is thick with the scent of honey and oak and, in the cooler months, the crackling fire sets the scene for tasting golden, small-batch meads crafted with local honey and a touch of old-world magic. The walls are lined with all sorts of wares, from jams and relishes to candles and teas. The adjacent ice-creamery specialising in honey ice-cream is the perfect spot for a post-beach treat on a hot day. honeywine.com.au

Boston Brewing Co.

One of the very first breweries in the Great Southern, Boston Brewing Co. captures the region's essence through its locally inspired brews and vibrant can artworks that tell the story of Denmark's iconic landscapes. The Tingletop Ginger Beer is an ode to the nearby tingle tree forest, while the Boondie Rye Pale Ale is a testament to Elephant Rocks. The venue itself is a warm, welcoming space to spend an afternoon – grab a tasting paddle and a pizza and get on Denmark time. bostonbrewing.com.au



GREENS POOL

A natural swimming hole like no other, Greens Pool is quite literally a slice of paradise. Sheltered by granite boulders, its crystal-clear waters stay calm year-round, making it the most tranquil place for a dip. The soft lily-white sand stretches for kilometres, and the marine life that calls this place home makes for a dazzling snorkelling experience – zebrafish, silver drummer, six-spined leatherjacket and mosaic sea stars are just some of the creatures you'll encounter. →



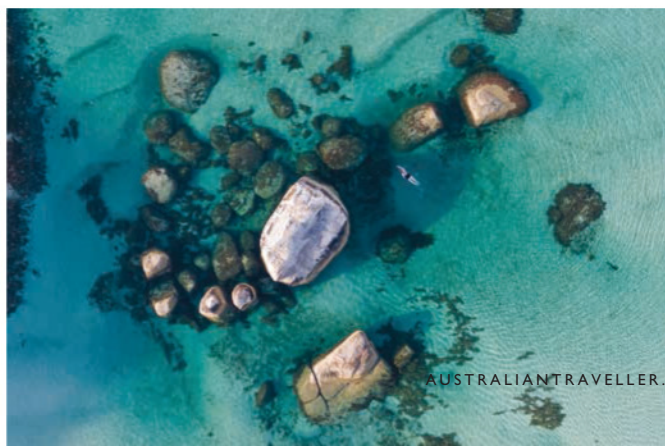
PEPPER & SALT RESTAURANT

Perched atop the Forest Hill cellar door is arguably Denmark's best restaurant, Pepper & Salt. Founded by Fijian chef Silas Masih, the menu weaves together Denmark's fresh local produce with the innovative use of spice. The result? Truly memorable dishes that you'll still be talking about in years to come. Finish your wine tasting downstairs at Forest Hill, then head on up to take in the views from Pepper & Salt's balcony before sitting down to your show-stopping meal. Just be sure to book ahead – the chef's reputation precedes him. pepperandsalt.com.au



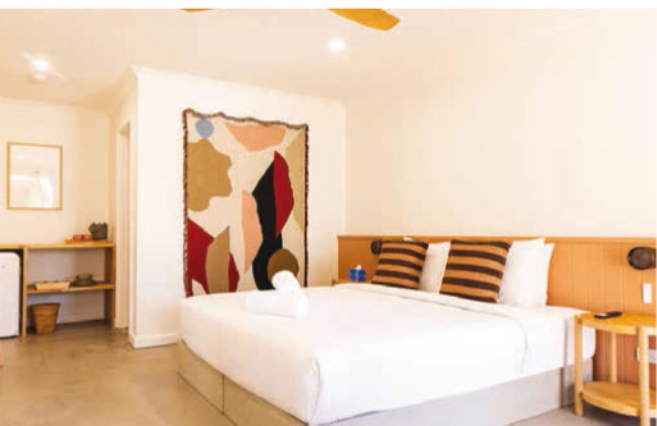
FOREST HILL WINES

Forest Hill has a special place in the history of Western Australia's wine industry, being the first cool-climate vineyard planted in the state. And, 50 years on, the winery is still family-owned and -run. A visit to the cellar door, situated in the middle of rambling green hills and verdant forest, is an absolute must. Guests enter through the majestic timber arched doors into a limestone 'cave' to sample the estate's superb wines – most notably, the crisp riesling. foresthillwines.com.au



THE DENMARK HOTEL

Sitting in the heart of Denmark since 1926, this beloved coastal pub has long been the town's meeting place for locals, wine lovers and travellers. Now, with a fresh creative team at the helm, The Denmark Hotel is stepping into a bold new chapter. Under one roof, you'll find the town's go-to bar and bistro, plus two exciting additions – The Lodge and Denmark Drops. The Lodge offers laid-back accommodation, while Denmark Drops is the community's newest cellar-slash-bottle shop, stocking a hand-picked selection of local wines, craft beers and spirits. boteldenmark.com.au



Elephant Rocks

Elephant Rocks is where nature is just, quite frankly, showing off. Massive, smooth granite boulders rise from Denmark's turquoise waters, resembling a herd of gentle giants wading through the sea. Sitting within William Bay National Park, the breathtaking spot is perfect for a refreshing swim, a secluded picnic or simply soaking in the raw beauty of Denmark's rugged coastline.

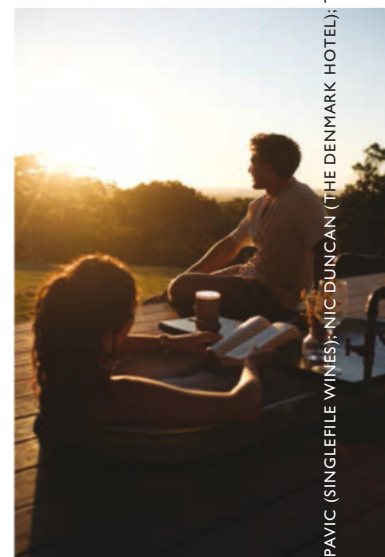
SINGLEFILE WINES

Singlefile has become synonymous with Denmark for good reason – the highly acclaimed winery not only produces consistently award-winning wines, but the cellar door offers one of the most exceptional tasting experiences in the state. Visitors are encouraged to bring a picnic they can enjoy alongside their complimentary seated tasting, overlooking the grounds, vineyard and charming sight of resident geese. Once you've tasted your way through the Singlefile range, wines are available by the glass and cheese boards are at the ready should you choose to linger – which you most certainly will. singlefilewines.com



HEYSCAPE TINY CABINS

Visitors to William Bay just outside of Denmark can tread with a lighter footprint during a stay at one of three new off-grid Heyscape cabins on Raintree Farm. The three new cabins – Sea, Salt and Sand – offer views of William Bay National Park and are perfectly positioned for guests to enjoy wildflower walks, swims at Greens Pool and Elephant Rocks and onsite access to award-winning venue, The Dam. heyscape.com.au



In partnership with Discovery Resorts and El Questro

INSPIRING SENSES IN THE EAST KIMBERLEY

The East Kimberley should be on *EVERY* bucket list – here's why.

Livistona palms soar out of chasms the colour of Valencia oranges. Shady waterholes beckon travellers daring to venture off the bitumen. Farms give way to vast plains that meet geological formations centuries in the making. The East Kimberley, in Western Australia's north-east, is one of the country's most treasured wilderness areas – and home to some of our most iconic stays.

LAKE ARGYLE

With rolling hills that glow amber at sunrise and glassy waters that reflect the Kimberley's bright blue sky, a visit to Lake Argyle is awe-inspiring. As Australia's second-largest man-made freshwater lake, travellers flock here to soak in the views.

Discovery Resorts – Lake Argyle is a lakeside oasis just a 50-minute drive south of Kununurra. The property is perched atop a cliff overlooking the sprawling Lake Argyle.

Originally built to provide accommodation for builders of the Ord River dam, the property became part of the Discovery Resorts portfolio in 2021. It then underwent a major upgrade to become one of Australia's best all-encompassing resorts, with premium waterfront villas and a famous infinity pool.

The biggest drawcard is the lake, which is best enjoyed on a cruise (you can even swim with the resident freshwater crocodiles). But the resort's heart is The Lake Argyle Cafe, where you can enjoy cold beer and live music.

As for accommodation, there are campsites, villas and cabins on offer. The Deluxe Lakeview Cabins, with views of the opposing cliff, are the top choice.



EL QUESTRO

El Questro is one of the most famous stays in Australia. A former cattle station, it's evolved into one of the country's most recognisable tourism destinations, where guests can reconnect with nature and its beauty.

Wild in spirit but immaculate in style, El Questro is a 283,000-hectare property like no other. Surrounded by dramatic gorges, impressive mountain ranges and secluded waterfalls, this is the perfect base for adventurous souls.

El Questro guests can stay at one of three properties, and the all-inclusive, adults-only Homestead – where 10 suites perch on the edge of a cliff – is the premium option. A Homestead stay includes a bespoke itinerary crafted by the reservations team.

At Emma Gorge, travellers fall asleep to the sounds of wildlife in safari-style tented cabins, while The Station is popular with



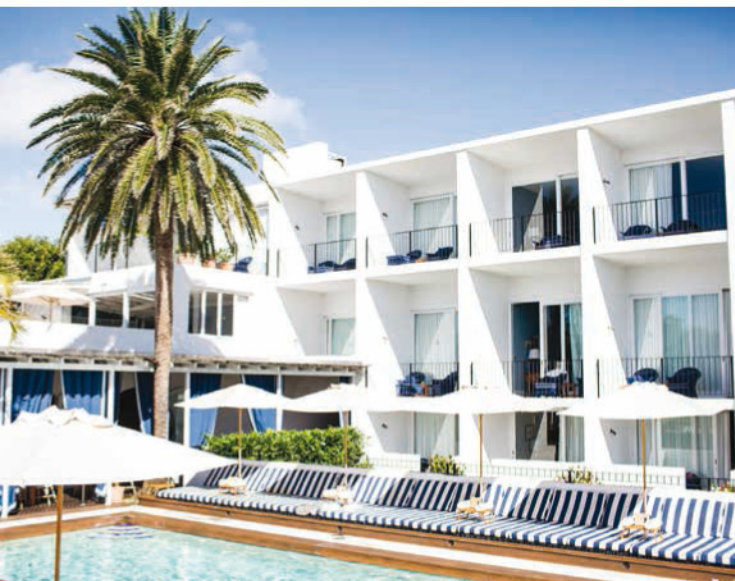
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
Admire Lake Argyle from the famous infinity pool; Sleep in the all-inclusive Homestead at El Questro resort; Take a 4WD tour through ancient lands; Recharge with a soak in picturesque waterholes.



families thanks to its simple yet comfortable air-conditioned rooms and campground.

El Questro retains a strong connection with its Traditional Owners, the Ngarinyin people. A highlight of a stay is the Injiid Marlabu Calls Us signature experience, during which guests learn about the land's ancestral heritage. Other experiences include birdwatching, hiking and four-wheel-driving.

Visit discoveryholidayparks.com.au/resorts



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: *Halcyon House* is a former surf motel; Transformed into boutique digs; *The Cabarita Beach* hotel graced our cover a decade ago; Dine at *Paper Daisy*; Anna Spiro's interiors are timeless.



Perfect 10

As former *Australian Traveller* cover star HALCYON HOUSE turns 10, editor at the time Lara Picone *RETURNS* to the surf motel-turned-boutique hotel in CABARITA BEACH to see how it measures up today.

IT WAS 2015 when Halcyon House first invited guests to the slumberous coastal town of Cabarita Beach in the Tweed, NSW. It was also the year I began my tenure as editor of this very magazine. A gleaming-white edifice of singular style, nothing quite of its ilk had appeared on the eastern coastline before. It was captivating, sharply crisp and, at the time, utterly unrivalled. I knew immediately it would be my first cover star.

While a lesser vision may have bulldozed the site and erected something immediately forgettable in its place, Halcyon House wasn't shying away from its 1960s surf motel origins. Instead, it was turning the floodlights on them. Here, in a mere slip of a beach town where a bakery numbered among the few highlights, a Capri-luxe aesthetic seemed at once absurd and somehow apropos.

With an unflinching white-and-blue palette and acute architectural lines, the 22-room hotel cut a sharp exterior silhouette. But inside, interior designer Anna Spiro layered hand-selected prints over textiles, tiles and flea market-found furnishings. The effect was Euro-styled, boho-adjacent sanctuaries of approachable luxury; a philocalist's fantasy brought to life.

When developer sisters Elisha and Siobhan Bickle first bought the ramshackle hotel with its Astro-turfed poolside and relatively obscure location, the idea was considered bonkers. But to say it has caught on is a severe understatement. In the years following Halcyon House's opening, dishevelled 1960s and '70s-era motels along the coast were fussed and polished with appreciation for their retro roots. Former relics of halcyon days, they were suddenly seen as precious stones embedded in plain sight. And their coveted beachfront locations doubled down on desirability for hoteliers.

So, 10 years on, how has this archetype held up against a litany of replicas? I recently checked back in to our one-time cover girl to find out if a decade had worn down her shine. But I discovered that

Spiro's interior pastiche, which unfurls from the rooms to the bright and breezy Paper Daisy restaurant and the wholly excellent spa, remains fresh and surprisingly current. Her bowerbird-like talent in weaving together style elements, from Hamptons to classic European, imbues each space with an enduring originality that has resisted tarnishing and stayed feeling current in the face of shifting trends over the past decade.

Paper Daisy is also as novel and considered as it was the first time I dined there, despite a rotation of head chefs. The attentive service balances affordability with the reservation required of a luxury stay that costs upwards of \$600 per night.

A lot has changed since 2015. Still, there's a semblance of comfort in knowing a good idea paired with good design can endure the fluctuations of tastes and our appetites for newness. Classics are so-called for a reason, and Halcyon House is well placed to remain one for another decade to come. halcyonhouse.com.au **AT**



PHOTOGRAPHY: KARA ROSENBLUND (POOL)



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to winter

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and be in **The Tweed** in just 5 minutes.

THE **TWEED**



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: While away a blissful few hours with friends at Tank Riviera; The Mooloolaba day spa doubles as a restaurant; And offers treatments such as massages and magnesium pools.



One fine day

From waterfront day CLUB to farm *RETREAT*, Tank Bathhouse has the *SUNSHINE* Coast wellness SCENE wrapped up, finds Celeste Mitchell.

WITH THE PROLIFERATION of bathhouses now open across Australia, it can be hard to imagine a time when they weren't a wellness staple of every city.

But when it opened quietly in 2020, Tank Bathhouse & Day Spa's first venue Tank Farm in Bli Bli – a 'hinterland lite' suburb 15 minutes north-west of Maroochydore – kicked off a day spa revolution on the Sunshine Coast. The collective of entrepreneurial owners behind the 16-hectare farm had been watching wellness trends with interest and, with the travel restrictions of Covid thrust upon the country, decided to embrace the concept of a 'daycation'.

"We wanted to really fuse that day spa concept with hospitality and entertainment and create a more holistic experience," says shareholder and Sunshine Coast local, Naj Elsayed. "Something that's just as much fun as it is relaxing."

And when the owners saw that a waterfront site in Mooloolaba they'd had their eyes on for years was finally for sale, they snapped it up. Opening in November 2022, their second outpost, Tank Riviera, appeared as interest in bathhouses was reaching fever pitch.

Six botanical-infused magnesium pools, a sauna and a steamroom are at the heart of the bathhouse, which is part day club, part breezy waterfront restaurant. A pick 'n' mix menu of experiences extends from massages and facials in the upstairs treatment rooms to elevated degustation dining and even a river cruise. A five-hour package that includes the works has been selling like a miracle serum ever since.

"A lot of the time when people are finished, they don't actually want to leave. They sit down on the deck and have a couple more drinks or a little bit of tapas," says Elsayed.

In contrast, the experience at Tank Farm is designed exclusively for two people at a time. The retreat can only be accessed as part of a three-hour package, which incorporates the bathhouse and lunch overlooking green pastures.

"We want to have people really feeling like they've had a five-star day, not just sat in a bath for an hour," explains Elsayed.

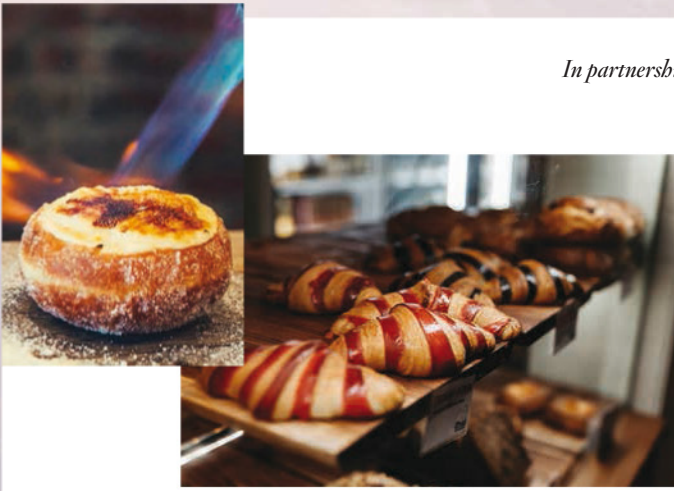
After a warm-up in the western red cedar sauna, I rinse off under the outdoor shower and dip into the first of four magnesium pools. A drink is deftly served and I slide my sunglasses on and lie back to listen to the

chilled folksy soundtrack. Surrounded by greenery in my own private space, looking up at the cloudless sky, I quickly lose track of time. I move up in temperature with each bath hop, then sit in the steam room for some extra detoxification before lunch. It's serenity encapsulated and I spend the rest of my day buoyed by an undercurrent of zen. On the occasions I've caught up with girlfriends at Tank Riviera, cocktails and conversations in the pools are as vivid in my memory as the remedial massage and waterfront tapas lunch. It's a social space – vibey and fun – which takes full advantage of its position on the Mooloolah River.

And while the two bathhouses complement each other nicely, Elsayed hints they're only just getting warmed up. A site in New Zealand is next on the cards, another in Queensland and two more interstate, including what will become a Tank Hotel. "So the daycation kind of becomes the staycation, where rather than it being five or six hours, it's maybe a night or two," he says.

As I pull myself from the final 38-degree pool and contemplate returning to reality, it sounds like just the ticket. tankspa.com.au

In partnership with Visit Geelong and The Bellarine



A TASTE OF AUTUMN

From rust-coloured foliage and *FOODIE* experiences to stunning *SUNSETS*, this part of Victoria is best explored as the mild days of *AUTUMN* arrive.

As the heat of the summer sun subsides and the milder days roll in, the stunning landscapes of Geelong and the Bellarine add pops of autumn hues to the rolling green. Packed full of jaw-dropping coastal scenes, inviting townships and over 40 cellar doors, autumn here is distinctly beautiful.

Whether you drive the 25 minutes from Avalon Airport or catch the short but scenic ferry from the Mornington Peninsula, this region is one of Australia's best long weekend destinations. Here's how to soak it up.

DAY ONE

Grab breakfast from Pavilion Geelong while watching the swimmers in Corio Bay, then walk along the scenic Art Deco waterfront to explore the historic piers, beautiful beaches and gleaming white yachts.

For lunch, head to the refurbished **FEDERAL MILLS** precinct, built in 1915, and pull up a table at **PADDOCK BAKERY**. Follow it up with a leisurely afternoon of gin tasting at **ANTHER DISTILLERY**.

Enjoy an evening of frivolity and decadence back in Geelong for dinner and a show at the newly reopened **GEELONG ARTS CENTRE**, then down a nightcap or two at the sleek **NON DISCLOSURE BAR**.

DAY TWO

Travel to the lush landscapes of Moorabool Valley to **MEREDITH FARM STORE**. Choose a seat outside in the leafy courtyard and enjoy a breakfast tasting platter.

Late morning, visit the cellar door at the **MOORABOOL VALLEY WINE COLLECTIVE**



(open the first weekend of each month), which encompasses three award-winning wine makers, before stopping by **AUSTIN'S WINES** for lunch and tastings at its dedicated tasting bar.

Continue on your foodie quest with dinner in Newtown at one of Geelong's oldest pubs, **SAWYERS ARMS TAVERN**. Asian fusion restaurant **TWO NOBLE** and the European flavours of **EILEEN'S CHARCOAL GRILL** are also onsite.

DAY THREE

For a light breakfast, head 20 minutes out of town to the rustic **KET BAKER**, known for its 100 per cent sourdough croissants, then travel the Bellarine Taste Trail, visiting producers like **BELLARINE SMOKEHOUSE**, **FLYING BRICK CIDER HOUSE** and **FARMDOG BREWING**.

Join **HARVEST EXPERIENCE's** Pasta & Pinot cooking class to make fettuccini and ravioli using ingredients from the garden for lunch.



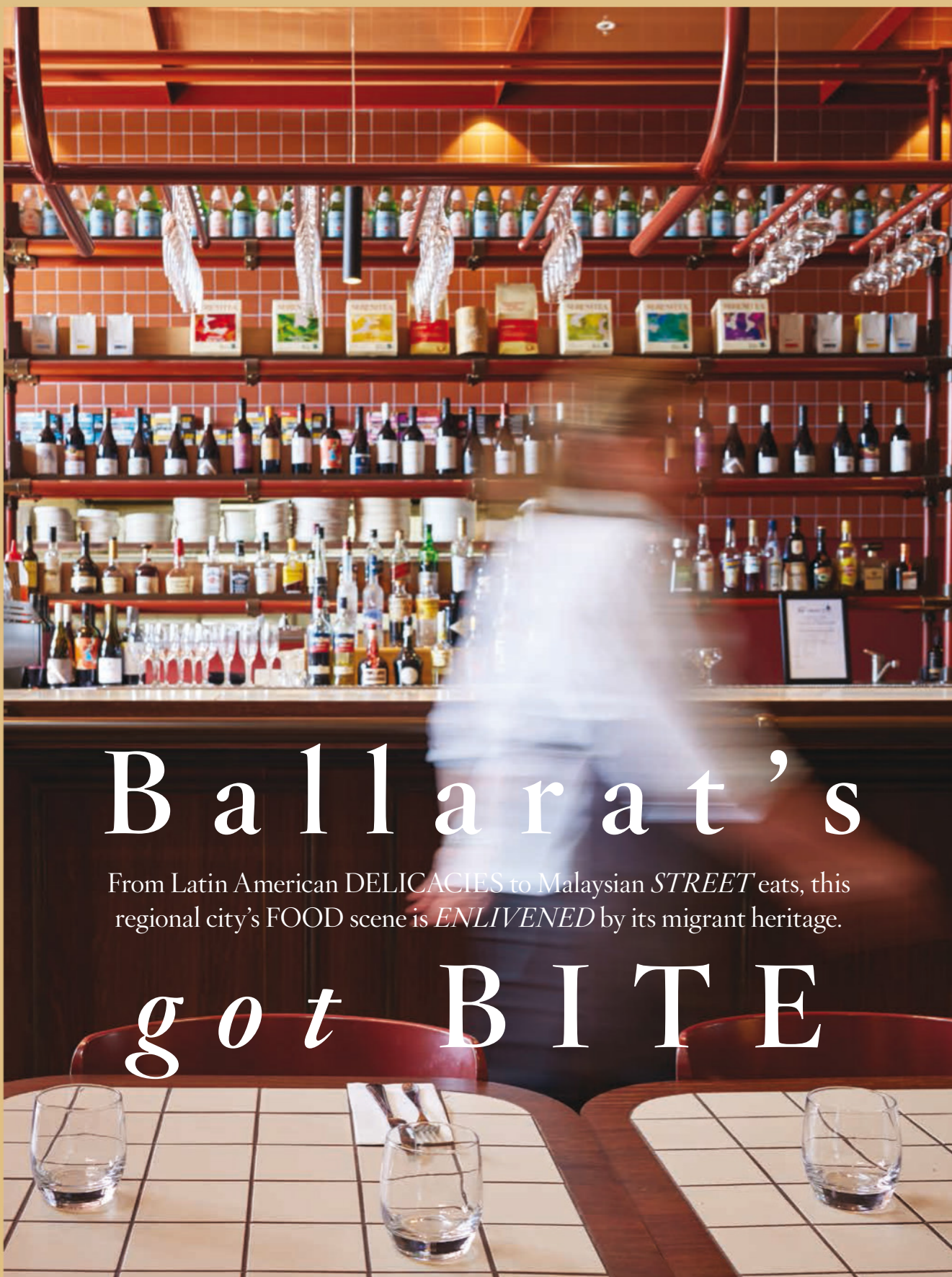
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Try delectable treats at **Paddock Bakery**; **Ket Baker** serves up top-notch sourdough croissants; **Visit Two Noble** for tasty Asian-fusion fare; Linger over tastings at **Austin's Wines**; Fresh blue mussels await in **Portarlington**.

Once cooked, enjoy your hard work with a glass of Bellarine Peninsula pinot noir.

After lunch, travel to the bayside town of Portarlington, where delectable blue mussels are harvested offshore. Stop by the quirky **DUCKS NUTS** for a unique gift before making your way to the restored **PORTARLINGTON GRAND HOTEL**, where you can enjoy a local gin and hearty dinner by the fire as the sun sets over the bay.

Discover more at visitgeelongbellarine.com.au





Ballarat's

From Latin American *DELICACIES* to Malaysian *STREET* eats, this regional city's *FOOD* scene is *ENLIVENED* by its migrant heritage.

got BITE



CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE:
Nolans is part of The Goods Shed, the buzzy new Ballarat Station Precinct; The Regent Multiplex remains a treasured landmark in Ballarat; The menu at Nolans champions local suppliers; Executive chef Konstantin Putkin celebrates simplicity; Ballarat is known for its gold-rush era buildings.

HEARING CHEF KONSTANTIN Putkin talk about Ballarat, you'd swear he was an official tourism ambassador, such is his genuine appreciation for the regional city in central western Victoria he now calls home.

"I call Ballarat 'the Little Big Town' because it's a regional area, but it's only an hour and 15 from Melbourne. You've got everything you could possibly want from a cuisine perspective here," says the chef, who has helped breathe new life into Ballarat's hospitality scene.

THE WORLD ON A PLATE

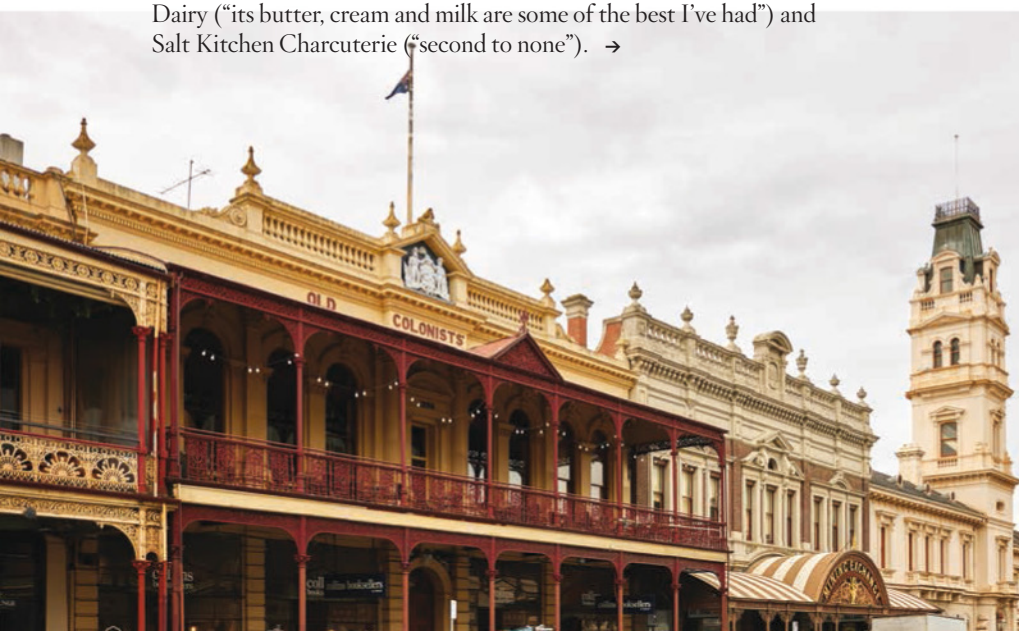
Born in St Petersburg, the executive chef of The Goods Shed spent much of his childhood living in Canada. He has since worked all over the globe, including stints in Nova Scotia, London and Tasmania/Lutruwita.

"I sank my teeth into the kind of food that I do now about eight years ago when I started learning about pickling, fermentation and whole animal butchery," says Konstantin.

Opened in late 2023, The Goods Shed's dining hall is a huge, multi-venue heritage space that is home to Nolans (which serves what Konstantin describes as a "weird hybrid of modern Australian and modern Italian") and Itinerant Spirits distillery and cocktail bar.

"I enjoy the easygoing vibe of Ballarat. There are lots of cool suppliers, vendors and producers around here," says Konstantin, adding that the slower pace is a welcome change: "I'm not out here doing 70- or 80-hour weeks like other chefs are. I've been there, done that and will never do it again."

The 2022 Foodservice Australia Chef of the Year is full of praise for the region's growers and producers that appear on his menus, including The Mushroom Connection ("absolutely phenomenal – potentially the best mushrooms I've used in my entire time in Australia"), Inglenook Dairy ("its butter, cream and milk are some of the best I've had") and Salt Kitchen Charcuterie ("second to none"). →





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: *The Goods Shed* executive chef Konstantin Putkin draws on his heritage with medovik (honey Russian cake); *The gentle curves and industrial aesthetic of Nolans* nods to the architecture of *The Goods Shed*; *Not Your Grandma's Pantry* nods to owner Lilly Wright's Malaysian upbringing; Lilly also operates *Flying Chillies*; *The market stall* sells signatures such as curry puffs and spicy laksa.



Apart from selling takeaway bao, nasi lemak and other Southeast Asian favourites at markets and events, Lilly also hosts cooking classes and runs a retail space called Not Your Grandma's Pantry, which stocks dumpling meal kits and condiments such as chilli oil and sambal.

For a long time, cultural diversity wasn't Ballarat's strong suit. But the place where a group of disgruntled gold miners famously swore allegiance to the Southern Cross flag during the 1854 Eureka Stockade has been welcoming a growing number of migrants in more recent times. According to the 2021 census, 11 per cent of Ballarat's residents were born overseas, with 89 different nationalities now calling the regional city home.

"In the last few years Ballarat has become really progressive. Five years ago it was hard to find a very good place to eat, but now there's so many new shops, restaurants, pop-ups and cultural events," Lilly reflects.

Even though Lilly is spread thin hosting cooking classes, running a retail business and acting as a City of Ballarat Intercultural Ambassador, she still finds time to do the local farmers markets.

"The customers and other stallholders are like family now. A lot of my friends started out as customers," says Lilly, adding: "The reason I stay in Ballarat is the people. The people here are just amazing – they're really understanding, loving and generous." →

While diners won't find many Russian influences on the menu at Nolans, chef is working on a nod to his birthplace: a unique riff on *medovik* (Russian honey cake) using fermented leatherwood honey, a dish he describes as "blending my love for native Australian ingredients with a family favourite using my great-grandmother's recipe".

Konstantin describes his customer base as "phenomenal", especially the dedicated mega-fans who return again and again – often ordering the same thing.

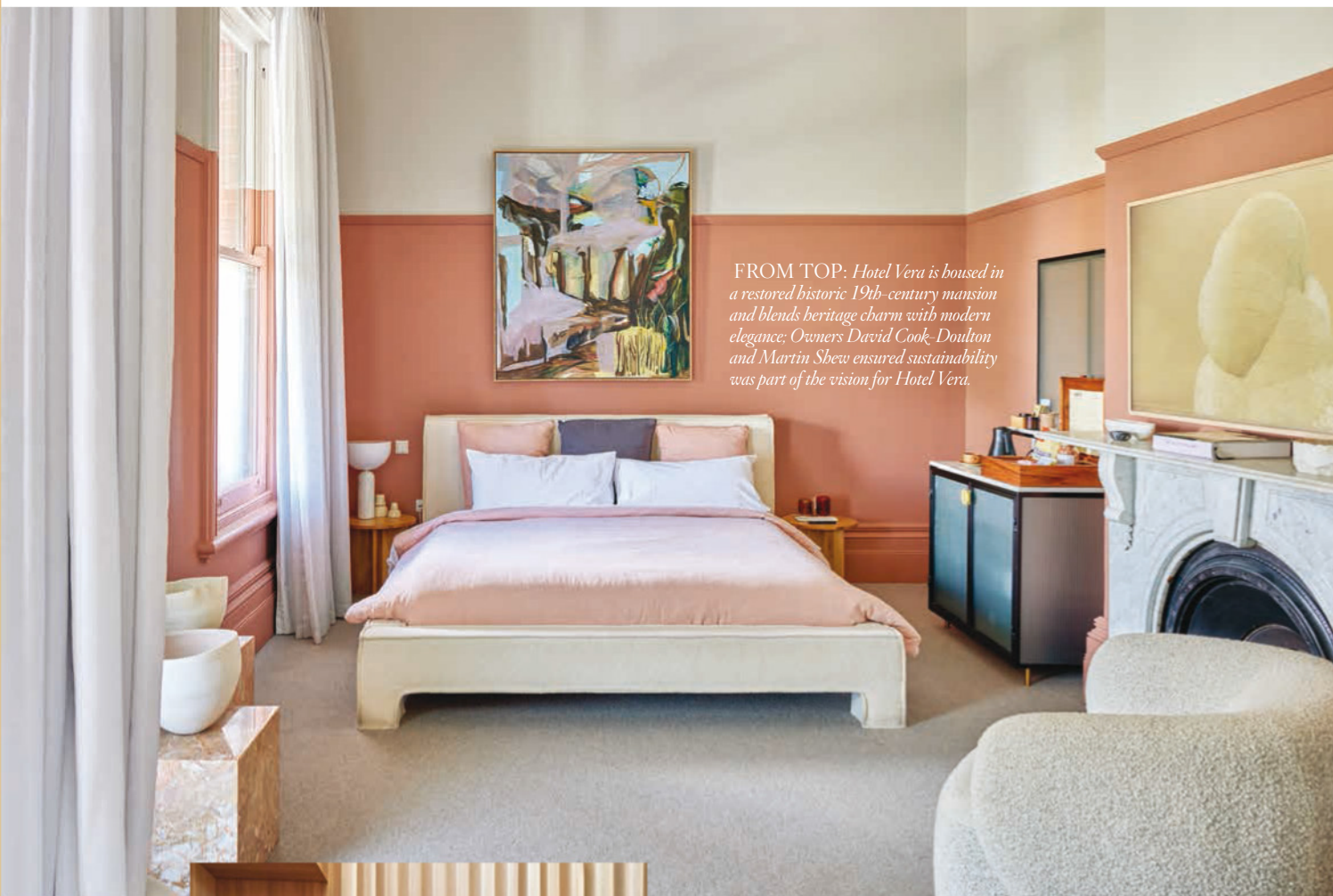
"One lady has even ordered the exact same pizza every Thursday night for the last year," Konstantin says.

FLYING THE FLAG FOR MALAYSIA

When Lilly Wright moved from Melbourne/Naarm to Ballarat with her husband six years ago, acclimatising to the weather was one of her biggest challenges. The owner of Flying Chillies grew up in balmy coastal Malaysia, so running her Malaysian and Indonesian food stall at local markets was a lesson in patience.

"From July to September is the most challenging because the weather can change four times in one day," says Lilly, with a knowing laugh.





FROM TOP: *Hotel Vera is housed in a restored historic 19th-century mansion and blends heritage charm with modern elegance; Owners David Cook-Doulton and Martin Shew ensured sustainability was part of the vision for Hotel Vera.*



Conscious Traveller

David Cook-Doulton and partner Martin Shew have put sustainability at the forefront of their beloved accommodation project, Hotel Vera. Located in central Ballarat, the heritage hotel is a masterclass in creating a thoroughly luxurious modern space without trashing the historical legacy of the 19th-century building it occupies. Construction materials were reused or recycled as much as possible and many nifty measures have been incorporated into the venture to lighten the environmental impact of each stay, including a Porsche EV charging station and a tree planted by local social enterprise Fifteen Trees for every guest who stays at the hotel. But Martin and David's commitment to sustainability didn't end when the hotel doors opened – the recent addition of solar panels has been instrumental in lowering the hotel's emissions. hotelballarat.com.au



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Restaurateur and chef Jose Fernandez has brought a burst of Latin American colour to Ballarat with Pancho and Meigas; Dishes at Pancho represent everywhere from Mexico to Patagonia; The menu emphasises cooking over the fire.



TAKING RISKS, REAPING REWARDS

Born in Galicia, Spain, restaurateur Jose Fernandez grew up in Venezuela. After spending time in Melbourne and Geelong, Jose and his partner chose to make a life in Ballarat 13 years ago, with Jose describing central Ballarat as “similar to a little European town”.

Jose first opened Meigas, a traditional Spanish tapas bar and eatery, and instead of playing it safe, took risks and challenged diners’ palates.

“In hospitality, we’re not selling food, we’re selling culture. We love getting people to try new things and the reception from the public has been wonderful,” says Jose.

Jose shares that Ballarat’s hospitality scene has evolved in the last decade, with many more multicultural food options available now than when he first arrived. And the people of Ballarat have mobilised to show their support, even if this means stretching their comfort zone to try new dishes.

“When we opened Meigas, nobody ordered the octopus. It’s a Galician national dish, a very simple dish of octopus served with paprika and olive oil. It took us two or three months to sell one serve of octopus – now it’s our top-selling dish,” Jose explains.

Buoyed by the success of his Spanish eatery, he opened Pancho five years ago to showcase Latin American fare. Again, it became a firm favourite with locals.

“When we opened Pancho, we didn’t know if people were going to visit because it’s a Latin American restaurant, not a Mexican restaurant. We have dishes from Colombia, Venezuela, Peru and Bolivia – flavours from Mexico all the way down to Patagonia,” he says.

Thirteen years after opening his first restaurant in Ballarat, Jose views the community as something special. He points out that during the pandemic lockdowns, people stepped up to show support by buying takeaway dinners and restaurant vouchers.

“We have regulars who come two, three, sometimes even four times a week. We are still here because of people like this who support us a lot.” **AT**

A traveller’s checklist

Getting there

From Melbourne Airport, Ballarat is an 80-minute drive along the National Highway.

Playing there

You’ll find Lilly and other local food producers at the **BALLARAT FARMERS MARKET** on Zoo Drive, Wendouree, held on the second and fourth Saturday of each month – bring a tote bag to stock up on Ballarat’s best. visitballarat.com.au; ballaratmarkets.com.au





Lancemore Crossley St.



Lancemore Lindenderry Red Hill



Alamanda Palm Cove by Lancemore



Lancemore Crossley St.



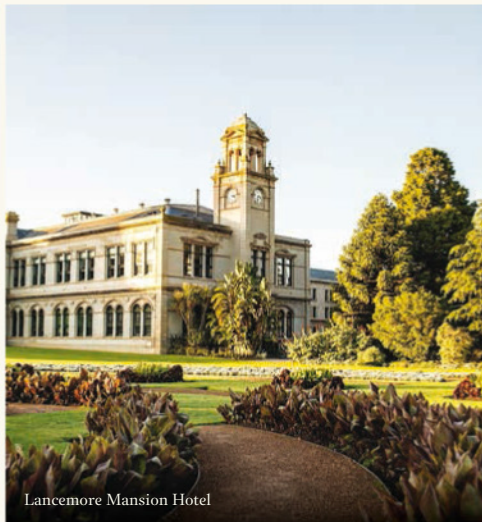
Lancemore Lindenderry Red Hill



Alamanda Palm Cove by Lancemore



Lancemore Mansion Hotel



Lancemore Mansion Hotel



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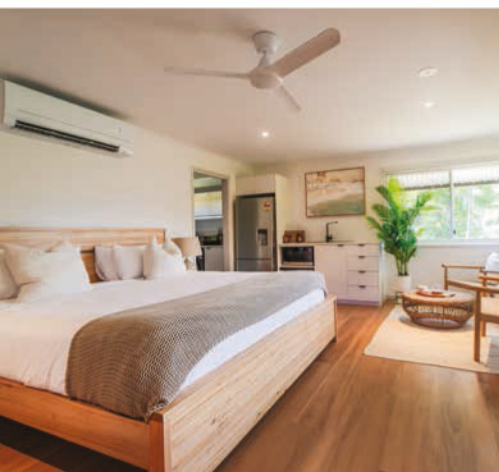
CURATED PLACES, IN AUSTRALIA'S
MOST REVERED DESTINATIONS.

lancemore.com.au | [@lancemorehotels](https://www.instagram.com/lancemorehotels)



L i f e ' s a b e a c h

One NIGHT encountering nesting *TURTLES* at Mon Repos BEACH is all it takes to transform *HOLIDAYMAKERS* into awestruck witnesses of MARINE conservation in action, writes Liz Bond.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: *Mon Repos* supports the largest concentration of nesting marine turtles on the eastern Australian mainland; *Mon Repos Conservation Park*; A hatchling makes its way across the sand; Inside *Turtle Sands'* ultra-comfortable Beach House.

EVENING UNFOLDS QUIETLY at the world-renowned Mon Repos Turtle Centre near Bundaberg. Rangers carefully guide 60 of us along the moonless beach, after locating the night's first nesting female loggerhead turtle.

Guided by an extraordinary internal compass, she has returned to the exact beach where she hatched three decades ago – a remarkable and puzzling navigational feat. Every sandy plod we take is calculated to ensure we don't disrupt the turtle's delicate egg-laying ritual.

We have dubbed her Roxanne (inspired more by The Police than Cyrano de Bergerac). She has instinctually and methodically powered her furiously flicking flippers to sculpt a sanctuary for her 114 ping-pong-ball-sized coloured eggs. Our rangers closely monitor Roxanne, recording her measurements and marking the nest's location. As the kids grow restless, Roxanne may or may not be flicking sand their way.

A new ecotourism benchmark, NRMA Parks and Resorts' Turtle Sands fits neatly behind the dunes – front row to the wonder of nesting and, weeks later, hatching loggerhead, flatback and green turtles. This stretch of the Southern Great Barrier Reef has long been a holiday playground. And now this former caravan park has been

transformed, leading the way in wildlife-friendly design with environmental sustainability and accessibility at its core.

When we arrived earlier, we let out a sigh of relief as we spotted a bank of EV chargers. Our new Omoda E5 loaner needs a top-up, and charging spots on the road from Brisbane/ Meanjin have been scarce, unreliable or out of action. It's the first of many sustainability features that set the resort apart. We've officially left the everyday and much less eco-friendly world behind.

A 100kwh solar system allows Turtle Sands to be almost off-grid but with enough grunt to power energy-efficient, motion-sensor air conditioning and lighting. At check-in, we take the Turtle Protection Promise, pledging to minimise impact and to only walk on the beach between 6am and 6pm.

Accommodation includes powered caravan sites, accessible studio rooms, glamping tents, three-bedroom villas and the Beach House – a reimagined 1917 schoolhouse. We're among the first to put the latter through its paces.

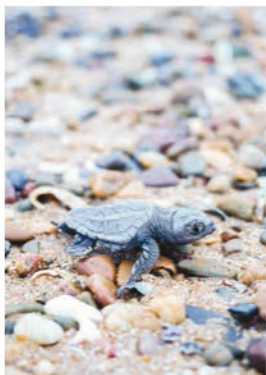
Designed for two with an ultra-comfortable king bed, the full kitchen makes self-catering a snap. Like the outdoor kitchen, we don't get to →





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CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Spot hatchlings on a Turtle Encounter Tour; End the day with a soak in the Beach House's tub; NRM Parks and Resorts' new Turtle Sands with its turtle-shaped pool; The Garden Mill Cafe in nearby Bargara; Enjoy the beach year-round.



give it a test run because Bundaberg's restaurants are too good to miss. Cleverly, the mud room entrance doubles as a butler's pantry with a pod coffee machine and wardrobe.

I get first dibs on the tempting tub in the oversized and luxurious bathroom. A ceiling fan makes an excellent backup or alternative to the air-con in the combined living and bedroom space that opens through floor-to-ceiling glass to a party-sized deck. It's the ideal spot for an early morning cuppa to listen to the ocean continually reacquainting itself with the sand.

Late afternoon, Turtle Sands transforms. Around the pool, families toast to the good life with unfiltered happiness. Plastic glasses gently thud stubby holder-dressed beers. Everyone, it seems, has left their everyday world behind. "Marco!" echoes from one end of the turtle-shaped pool, met with thunderous "Polo!" responses.

Sprawling teenagers scroll phones while still-dripping kids dart about smelling of sunscreen. Sizzling sausages mingle with the aroma of fresh pizza from the food truck. The sheer joy is infectious. This is more than a holiday – it's a celebration of family and nature.

With only a million-star sky and sliver of silver moon to light the way, our Omoda E5 seems at home as we return later from dinner at the outstanding Water St Kitchen. Turtle Sands is dark except for motion-sensor lights. Still, except for the occasional blood-curdling scream of eastern curlews, it's another moment to breathe in the briny air and just be. **AT**

A traveller's checklist

Getting there

Fly into Brisbane/Meanjin and hire an EV for the leisurely four-hour eco route to **MON REPOS**, a 15-minute drive from Bundaberg. Download the Charge@Large app to avoid range anxiety.

Staying there

TURTLE SANDS is located on Mon Repos Beach. It has a range of accommodation including powered sites from \$63 per night, studio rooms from \$216 per night, glamping tents from \$267 per night and villas from \$370 per night (based on mid-season rates). Accessible studios and villas are also available. turtlesands.com.au

Playing there

TURTLE ENCOUNTER TOURS run every evening between November and March from Mon Repos Turtle Centre.

MONSOON AQUATICS is leading the way in reef conservation – propagating and spawning coral for replanting.

Eating there

Take Elliott Heads Road to **TINABERRIES** for the best strawberries you'll ever eat. Enjoy breakfast at **ONE LITTLE FARM** among sweet-smelling flowers and relish a delicious lunch at local favourite **THE GARDEN MILL CAFE**, which is edging towards zero food waste.

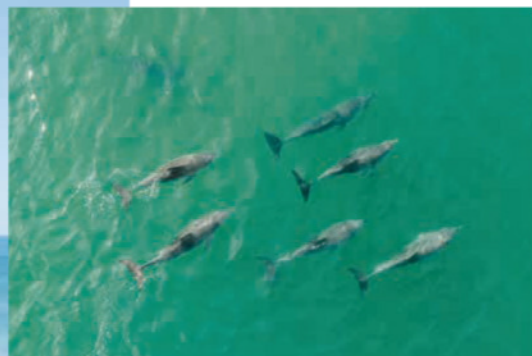
WATER ST KITCHEN has exquisite food, a stellar wine list and service to match.

Family-owned **KALKI MOON DISTILLERY** is Bundaberg's best artisan distillery known for gin rather than rum.

Quench your thirst on a **BUNDABERG DRINKS** tour. For more information, visit bundabergregion.org



In partnership with Visit Mandurah



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:
Come face-to-face with impressive sculptures, including Thomas Dambo's Santi Ikto; Spot the resident pod of bottlenose dolphins; Mandurah Houseboats offers a unique holiday on the water; Enjoy a delicious long lunch with Wild Seafood Experience.

MANDURAH: WA'S COASTAL GEM

Discover the *PERFECT* road trip stopover between Perth and WINE country.

Western Australia punches above its weight when it comes to coastal hotspots, but no other town or city has seen a tourism boom quite like Mandurah. Named Australia's Top Tourism Town in 2023, it's the relaxed beachside break you've been searching for. And sitting between Margaret River and Perth, Mandurah is perfectly placed – it's just a 55-minute drive from Perth's CBD.

PLAY

Wetlands and rivers, ocean and inlet; Mandurah's laid-back lifestyle centres around the aquatic, with its waterways covering twice the ground of Sydney Harbour. The estuary is home to a pod of 100 bottlenose dolphins, while prized blue manna crab live on the inlet's silty bottom. Spot the former from an hour-long dolphin cruise, or try your hand at catching the latter by wading in the shallows with a scoop net in hand.

You don't have to get wet to appreciate the waterways, with 600 kilometres of cycleways and scenic walking trails traversing the estuary, inlet and coast. Follow the 30-kilometre coastal ride and you'll find one of Thomas Dambo's headline-making **GIANTS OF MANDURAH** sculptures, *Santi Ikto*. There are five sculptures around Mandurah, all hidden amid gum-filled reserves or sitting sentry over the water. Two of them are stops on a three-hour e-bike tour that departs from **THE BIKE KIOSK** in town.

EAT

Mandurah's culinary scene reflects its relaxed lifestyle, with large, honest meals and locally brewed beer. Tuck into house-smoked meats at **THORNY DEVIL BREWERY** or a woodfired pizza at **BOUNDARY ISLAND BREWERY**, washing it all down with a fresh ale. Or hire a self-skippered circular BBQ Boat, cruising the canals as your sausages sizzle away. Seafood fans will love the **WILD SEAFOOD EXPERIENCE**, where dolphin cruise meets long-table lunch and eight courses of crab, crayfish and scallops await.



STAY

With so many waterways comes abundant waterside stays, like the self-contained **SEASHELLS MANDURAH** on the shores of Comet Bay. The calm, oceanic outlook from the one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments and villas is as close to Maldivian as Mandurah gets. **THE SEBEL MANDURAH**, just a hop, skip and jump from the **MANDURAH PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE**, has a different view entirely, overlooking the estuary and lively foreshore.

But you can't get any closer to the water than on a vessel from **MANDURAH HOUSEBOATS**, taking to the estuaries and tributaries for peaceful rest surrounded by the element that makes Mandurah so special.

Learn more at visitmandurah.com



A R T

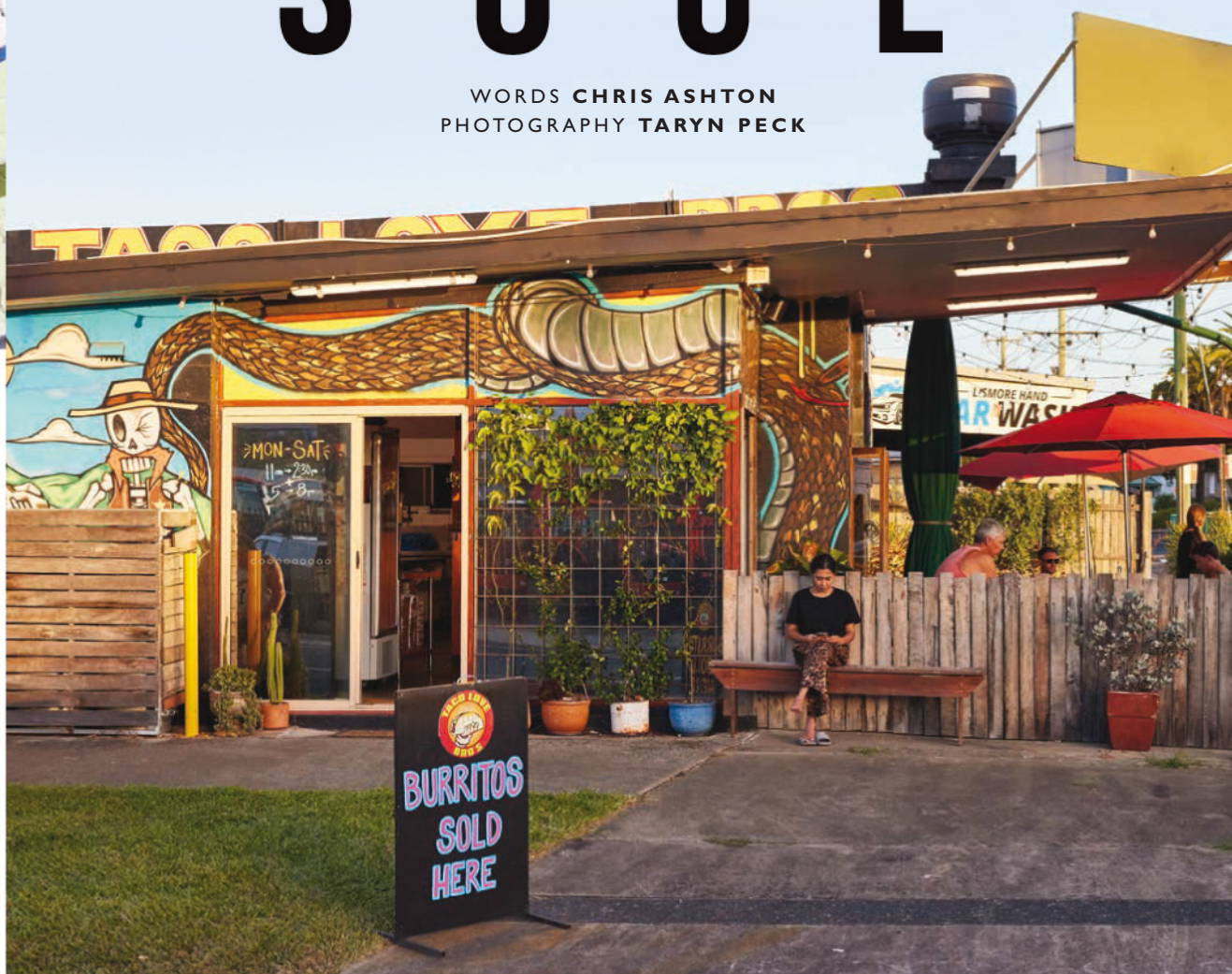
Three *YEARS* on from devastating floods, the **VIBRANT** northern

A N D

NSW community of Lismore is *INVITING* us back with a renewed **SPIRIT**,
rebuilt **LANDMARKS** and an impressive new rail *TRAIL* to boot.

S O U L

WORDS **CHRIS ASHTON**
PHOTOGRAPHY **TARYN PECK**





IT'S DAWN ON MONDAY 28 February 2022. Heavy rain has lashed the Northern Rivers overnight – the ground swollen from weeks of unrelenting fall – and Lismore's worst fear has just come to pass. The levee protecting it from Wilsons River has overtopped, with predictions the swiftly rising waters may soon peak far above the current record of 12.11 metres.

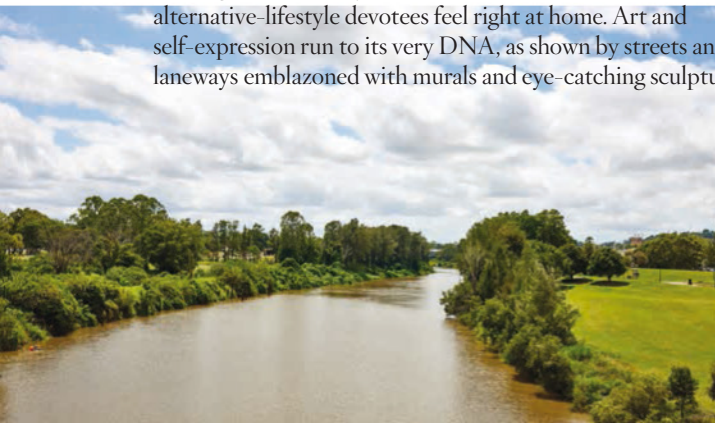
Within the day, the city's heart is swamped by more than 14 metres of flood water: a swirling, reddish-brown barrage blocking roads, stranding people in homes and spurring a 'tinny army' of boat owners to evacuate the young and old alongside emergency services.

Lismore's location at the junction of Leycester Creek and Wilsons River was chosen for ease of timber export in the 1840s. And though the town and its surrounds have flooded many times over the years – including in the wake of Cyclone Alfred in March – the scale and severity of this disaster caught everyone off guard. It was a perfect storm: significant rain across multiple catchments, all flowing to a bottleneck at Lismore.

Standing atop the levee today, it's hard to believe the meandering waters below could ever reach this lofty height, let alone rise more than two metres above it. It's not until you see flood markers dotted across town that the gravity of what happened is truly put into perspective. Three years on, scars are still raw. Rows of empty houses stand silent, buildings obscured by scaffolding as restorations draw on. And yet, there's also a growing sense of hope and renewal, with the majority of shops and cafes back in business and the recent reopening of Lismore Regional Gallery a powerful sign that life is at last returning to normal.

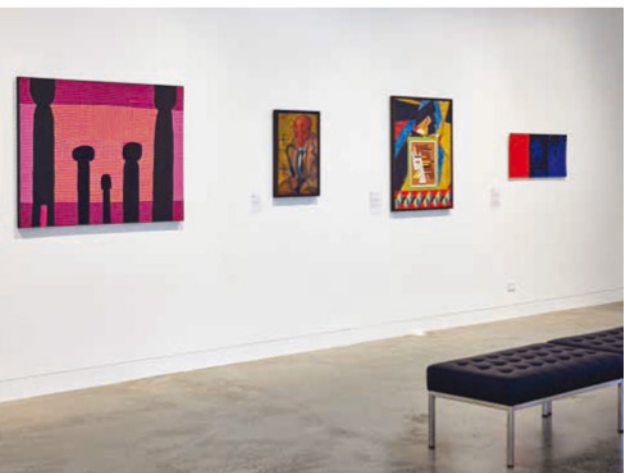
BACK TO THE HEART

To understand what a big deal the gallery is, you need to consider Lismore's makeup. While founded on timber cutting and dairy farming, it's now a city where diverse cultures, creatives and alternative-lifestyle devotees feel right at home. Art and self-expression run to its very DNA, as shown by streets and laneways emblazoned with murals and eye-catching sculptures. →



CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE: *Lively Taco Love Bros*; The town's *In the Heart* sculpture invites visitors to enter the laneways; Lismore Regional Gallery has contributed to the town's revival; Enjoy locally roasted coffee on ice at *Timbré*; The coffee bar and community library facilitates First Nations storytelling; Wilsons River runs through the heart of Lismore.





It's also the heart of the Rainbow Region – a place known for its wildly diverse character and inhabitants, of which LGBTQIA+ social group Tropical Fruits (famed for its fabulous NYE celebrations) and NORPA theatre company are just two of the household names.

The highest profile by far is Lismore Regional Gallery, not only as one of the longest-running regional galleries in NSW, but as a focal point for all local passions and walks of life. Since its feverishly anticipated reopening in September, “the overwhelming sentiment has been people are just so happy to have their gallery back,” enthuses gallery director Ashleigh Ralph, who was just six months into the role when the natural disaster struck.

While pointing out the internal flood mark – a height that’s still hard to fathom – Ashleigh details how, as per emergency procedures, artworks had been moved to the gallery’s upper level when news of the looming flood spread. But this time around, it wasn’t high enough, as water almost reached the ceiling of the second storey.

In the weeks after waters receded, Lismore’s community spirit kicked in: 300 volunteers clambered over damage and debris alongside Ashleigh and her team, clearing tables, chairs and a thick coating of mud to unearth the gallery’s precious collection. Conservators and curators also carefully placed works into cold storage for immediate preservation.

Pieces were then triaged over six months, followed by an 18-month restoration in parallel to the building’s own reconstruction. Upgraded emergency plans – artworks are now moved offsite when a flood is imminent – and more resilient internal structures that can be easily hosed out are two other positive outcomes.

For Ashleigh, the gallery’s reopening and subsequent conversations have revealed “it’s so much more than a building, much more than art – it’s a coming together of people and community.”

HITTING A NEW GEAR

The reopening of the gallery wasn’t the only local celebration held in Lismore in late 2024. The end of the year also saw the launch of the ‘Lismore to Bentley’ section of Northern Rivers Rail Trail, which twists and turns for a little over 16 kilometres through vivid countryside and historic towns. This new section will ultimately form part of a 132-kilometre rail trail linking Murwillumbah to Casino.

Embracing the trend for upcycling, steel artworks made of repurposed rail lines are dotted along the path, while shelters and picnic tables, bike racks and even hitching rails and troughs for horses make it an inviting trail for all ages and abilities.

At the Lismore end of the run lies Two Mates Brewing: a brewery, taphouse and essential pre- and post-ride pit stop. Opened in December 2021 by Andrew Newton and Grant Smith, it too was hit by the flood, with more than three metres of water gushing through the 150-year-old former rail shed. And yet, it’s not just the beers on tap that have seen it become a landmark – it’s how they supported the community.

“We were back open three weeks after the flood,” Grant proudly divulges, revealing the fledgling brewery fast “became a hub for all the community through the rebuild phase,” even as its own full restoration efforts would continue for a further nine months.

Alongside its brewing (try the Bicycle Trale Pale Ale), Two Mates still plays this role with aplomb, hosting gatherings from live music to art exhibitions, car rallies and bike meet-ups. Casual bites and rotating food trucks keep locals and visitors well fed, too. →





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Gallery artworks were restored after the flood; Andrew Newton of Two Mates Brewing; The landmark brewery is on the rail trail; The Back Alley Gallery has added vibrancy to the town's laneways; Lismore Regional Gallery director Asbleigh Ralph; A painted telephone booth.



Despite challenges still facing the community (the neighbourhood surrounding Two Mates is at just 15 per cent occupancy), Grant feels Lismore is turning a corner in its rebuild, with the gallery, rail trail and events such as the 'Legends of Cricket Twenty20' in February just what the city needed to fuel an appetite for rediscovery.

ANOTHER SIDE OF THE NORTHERN RIVERS

As for the rest of Lismore's offerings? These too echo the theme of diversity and renewal – an eclectic culinary scene kneaded and shaped by those who call it home; natural wonders protected through grassroots activism and redefining the status quo. You can't go past the divine Asian fare of Mamamoi and fresh Mexican dishes at lively Taco Love Bros, while primo brekkie hangouts The Bank Cafe, Dark Horse Espresso and Hotel Metropole are all must-visits. Perhaps the most inspiring, however, is Timbré: a cafe and community hub, where a library of First Nations authors – dubbed the Blackfulla Bookclub – invites readers to challenge their world view while enjoying locally roasted Kwila Coffee from Papua New Guinea.

Beyond the city, nature steals the spotlight, as macadamia plantations and rolling farmland give way to remnant rainforest and national parks. The 100-metre cascade of Minyon Falls, plus walking trails at Terania Creek and Protesters Falls, provide an intriguing glimpse into the timber-gathering heritage on which much of the Northern Rivers was founded.

The best part? Holiday hubs Ballina, Byron Bay and Tweed Heads are all less than an hour's drive away, making Lismore not just an idyllic side trip but a chance to experience a slice of regional life. It's a rural city, a commercial centre and truly a destination to watch. **AT**

A traveller's checklist

Getting there

Lismore is a scenic 30-minute drive from Ballina-Byron Gateway Airport, 45 minutes from Byron Bay or 75 minutes from Gold Coast Airport.

Staying there

Freshly renovated, **LISMORE GATEWAY MOTEL** is the one to pick. Options include queen and twin rooms with garden views, king rooms with balconies,

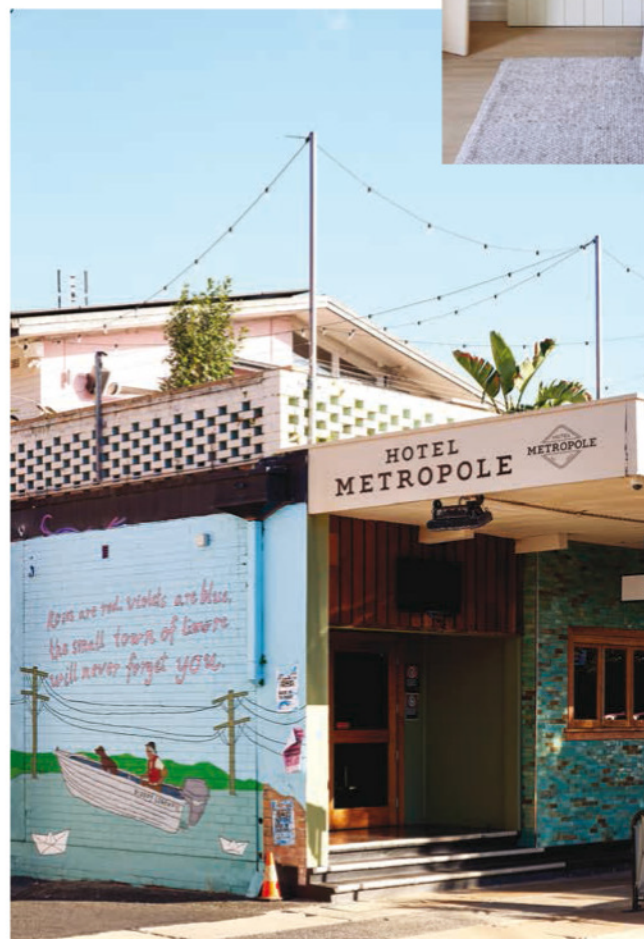
a family room that sleeps four and accessible rooms. It also has a pool surrounded by lush greenery, a gym, guest kitchen and laundry. lismoregatewaymotel.com.au

Eating there

Aside from the cafes and restaurants mentioned, you can't go past **LISMORE PIE CART** – it's a local institution. lismorepiecart.com



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Mamamoi offers diners an enticing taste of Asia; The swimming pool lures visitors to the Lismore Gateway Motel; Inside the modern rooms; Hotel Metropole is a must-visit.



FEEL MORE IN LISMORE



Lismore is the gateway to some of the most beautiful and unspoiled natural environments in Australia. Located in the Northern Rivers hinterland of NSW, just 30 minutes from iconic coastlines, and set within a stunning natural landscape.

With its rainforests, waterfalls, mountains, diverse wildlife, and natural experiences, feel more in Lismore.

visitlismore.com.au

 NIGHTCAP NATIONAL PARK

LISMORE
NIMBIN + VILLAGES

MONARTO SAFARI RESORT

HOTEL | LODGE | SPA

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STAY WILD

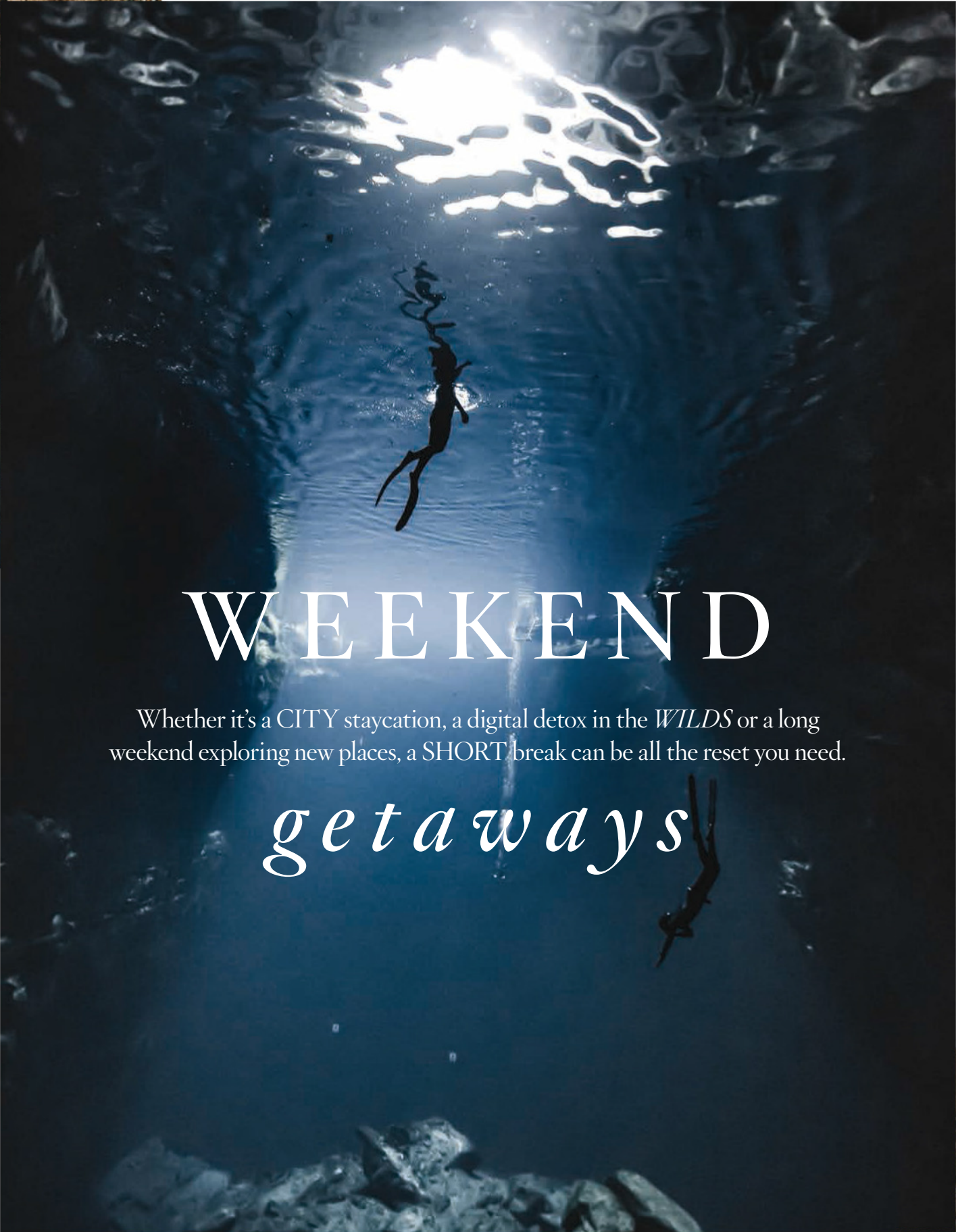
Opening May 2025

100 *Greatest* GETAWAYS *

Ancient RAINFORESTS, dramatic waterways, craggy *COASTLINES* and glittering cityscapes. Epic ROAD TRIPS, food festivals and outback gatherings under star-strewn skies. These diverse *LANDSCAPES* and experiences set the scene for our ULTIMATE rundown of great Australian getaways.



*Turn to page 121 for this epic
Murray River escape and more...*

An underwater photograph showing two divers swimming in clear blue water. Sunlight filters down from the surface, creating a bright, shimmering effect. The divers are silhouetted against the light. The overall mood is serene and adventurous.

WEEKEND

Whether it's a CITY staycation, a digital detox in the *WILDS* or a long weekend exploring new places, a SHORT break can be all the reset you need.

getaways



Limestone Coasting

Pristine beaches, lush vineyards and dazzling sinkholes; it's entirely possible to enjoy three separate holidays around South Australia's Limestone Coast over a long weekend, writes Dilvin Yasa.

FIVE MINUTES IN MOUNT GAMBIER and mermaids are everywhere, the dazzling blue waters of Kilsby Sinkhole awash with social media types clad in satin scales and baubled headdresses. It wouldn't be unusual to see swimmers, snorkellers or even South Australian police divers, who have been using the celebrated sinkhole as a training site since the 1980s, but... mermaids? Fifth generation owner Graham Kilsby laughs as he shrugs and shows me around his ever-growing facilities, explaining that the recent diversity – not to mention the jump in bookings (there's now a waitlist for many of his tours) – is a result of the tourism boom now being felt across all corners of the Limestone Coast.

Perhaps what's most surprising about this boom isn't that it's happening, only that it's taken so long for the Limestone Coast (named for the limestone formed more than 25 million years ago, underpinning much of what makes the attractions so singular) to garner international interest. Its 350-kilometre coastline dotted with unspoilt beaches and quaint fishing towns is a strong start, but it's also home to a lush rural hinterland teeming with wineries, as well as a wealth of geological attractions that range from the aforementioned sinkholes and crater lakes to the ancient Naracoorte Caves. Is it possible to enjoy wildly different types of holidays in the space of just three days? I'm about to find out.

Striking the perfect balance between city conveniences and country charm, Mount Gambier – a short flight from both Adelaide/Tarntanya and Melbourne/Naarm – provides the ultimate welcome to the region. In the heritage town, lunchtime crowds form a steady (and justifiable) queue for a table at ever-popular Metro Bakery & Cafe, while boutiques such as Green Door Decor and Lima & Co provide plenty of shopping opportunities.



CLOCKWISE
FROM
OPPOSITE:
Diving in Kilsby
Sinkhole; Little Blue
Lake; Humpalicious
Camel Farm; Cape
Dombey Obelisk in
Robe; Relaxing on
Long Beach; Walk the
Robe Coastal Trail.

Less than 15 minutes' drive away, a geological wonderland awaits for the more adventurous among us, from the sunken gardens of Umpherston Sinkhole and the walking trails around Blue Lake, to the swimming opportunities of Little Blue Lake which, like Blue Lake, transforms from steel grey to a vibrant blue between November and March. The mermaids, I'm sure, can be found at all of these spots, but Kilsby has something the others don't: an onsite gin distillery and brand-new luxury accommodation to make the most of the snorkelling and diving options. The water (up to 70 metres deep and ironically, gin-clear) is enticing, but the eight-degree chill insists I take an educational sinkhole tour detailing its colourful history, enough that I still leave town feeling like an adventurer.

Now Robe, a picturesque coastal beauty 130 kilometres away, doesn't exactly fly under the radar, transforming from a quiet village to the South Australian equivalent of Byron Bay come the summer months. The drive from Beachport to Robe, dotted with pristine, oft-abandoned beaches may just be one of Australia's loveliest. Pulling into Victoria Street, the beating heart of the town, it becomes clear that there's a romance to having it mostly to yourself in the cooler months.

Sure, swimming at Long Beach might be out and the Robe Coastal Trail past Cape Dombey Obelisk less than savoury, but the cooler weather presents a welcome opportunity to dine fireside at the Caledonian Inn, meet the camels of Humpalicious Camel Farm, shop for repurposed homewares at Transmutation and consume my body weight in piping hot coffee at Mahalia Coffee. It's a relaxing beach stay with a difference, made all the better with the ultimate beachside accommodation: a converted church on a hill, appropriately titled Church on the Hill. Here, I embrace fireside reading, bubble baths and much sea gazing as I finally come to understand the concept of a destination that positions itself as a barefoot boutique blend. →





Dotted with unspoilt beaches and quaint fishing towns, the Limestone Coast is also teeming with wineries and geological attractions.

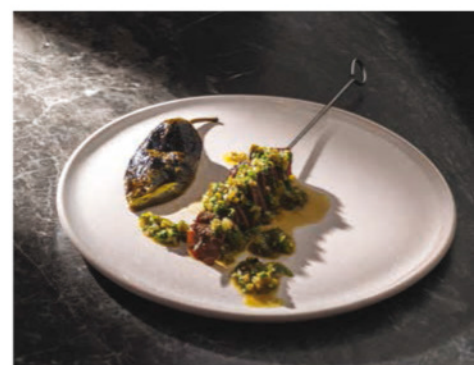
CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: *The Menzies Vineyard Retreat; Yalumba vineyards; Deluxe dining at Mayura Station; Zema Estate; Ottelia Tasting Room & Restaurant.*

Driving an hour inland to reach Coonawarra, arguably the most celebrated of the Limestone Coast's six wine regions, is hardly a tough task – particularly when so much of it takes place through rolling hills and patchwork fields. Yet, driving these quiet, and frankly oh-so-remote roads, you can't help but wonder, what exactly does Coonawarra have for travellers who aren't so keen on placing all their holiday dreams in one cabernet grape-heavy basket? As it happens, Kerry and Simon Meares of Coonawarra Experiences have all the answers to the questions that have yet to form. Born out of their love of Coonawarra wine in 2017, the duo have expanded the tours they offer (both private and group) to encompass a range as diverse as a Caves, Cabernet & Kangaroos tour, a Day in the Life Farm Experience or a luxurious Mayura Station Stay, Dine & Wine tour. Me? I've opted for a Private Bespoke Journey because I'm greedy, keen to see a little bit of everything Coonawarra possesses in a short period of time.

A couple of hours in and one thing becomes clear: despite Coonawarra's diminutive size (it's only 14 kilometres long), it packs a punch, serving up more than 20 cellar doors. A premium experience at Wynns Coonawarra Estate provides the ultimate starting line, but is followed in quick succession with wine (and platter) tasting at Patrick of Coonawarra, Zema Estate and, as we head into the township of Penola, a visit to see Peta Baverstock, winemaker and creator of Cuvée-Co Wines, a range of sparkling wines. Lest I get worried that my day is too wine-heavy, Kerry is immediately onto it, giving me a tour of Yallum Park, said to be the best preserved Victorian home in Australia, and walking me through historic Petticoat Lane, where cottages dating back to the 1850s can be visited and, in some cases, even rented for a short stay.

Obligatory photos snapped at Coonawarra Railway Siding, lunch at Ottelia thoroughly enjoyed and the scenic (and flat) 19-kilometre cycle of Coonawarra Rail Trail considered, it's time for a final meal at Pipers of Penola before I head back towards Mount Gambier Airport. On the way, my phone rings: I've forgotten my wine. But not to worry, because Kerry is driving – 40 minutes down the road – to reunite me with it.

Sure, I could say the Limestone Coast might have some of the greatest food, beaches and geological wonders, but the lasting memory I'll always have? Its gorgeous people. **AT**



A traveller's checklist

Getting there

Fly to Mount Gambier from Melbourne/Naarm and Adelaide/Tamrtanya with Qantas.

Staying there

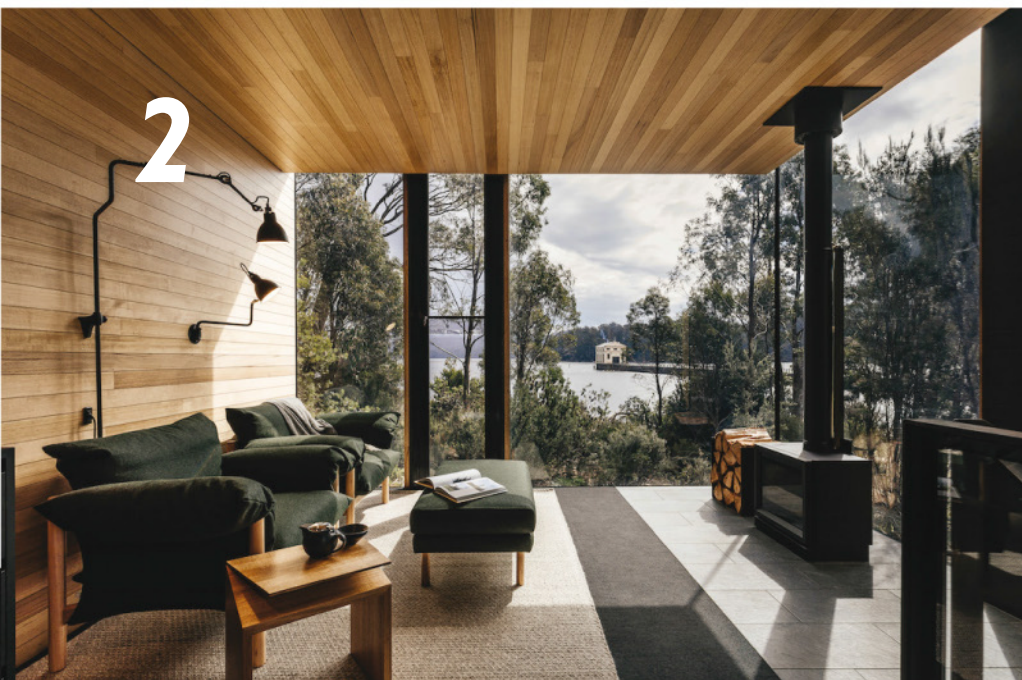
Steeped in history, **MOUNT GAMBIER HOTEL** is in the centre of town, while the **MENZIES VINEYARD RETREAT & WINE ROOM BY YALUMBA** sits nestled within a lush vineyard.

Playing there

For more information see visitlimestonecoast.com.au



2



Switch off in the Tassie wilderness

If your idea of a perfect weekend means a digital detox in the wilderness, this unique adults-only retreat in a historic hydro-electric station on a glacial lake might be just the ticket. Pumphouse Point is located on Lake St Clair in the central highlands of Tasmania/Lutruwita's Wilderness World Heritage Area, just 2.5 hours' drive from Hobart/Nipaluna and Launceston. Here, your boutique digs offer front-row seats to the drama of the landscape that envelops you.

Above and beyond in the Hunter Valley

There are myriad ways to experience the Hunter Valley, just a two-hour drive from Sydney/Warrane. While the region is best known for its award-winning restaurants and cellar doors, teetotallers aren't completely left wanting.

Float in the sun-blushed skies over the vineyard-laden landscape with Balloon Aloft (awarded the Excellence in Accessible Tourism award at the Australian Tourism Awards 2025 for its accessible hot air balloon flights over the Hunter), join an outdoor cooking class at Majors Lane in Lovedale or head to Hunter Valley Resort and Farm for a range of activities, from barrel rolling to horse riding. Squeeze every drop out of your visit with a pampered stay at Elysia Wellness Retreat.

3



4

Luxe out in Trentham

Like its nearby siblings Kyneton and Daylesford, the tiny gold rush town of Trentham in Victoria's Macedon Ranges has been increasingly luring Melburnians away from the city for a weekend, if not a tree change, with its ever-expanding hit list of eateries, boutiques and galleries. The latest addition seals the deal: a luxuriously renovated two-bedroom weatherboard cottage has opened at The Cosmopolitan Hotel, a historic country pub and dining destination in and of itself.





5

Stay at Sydney's hottest new hotel

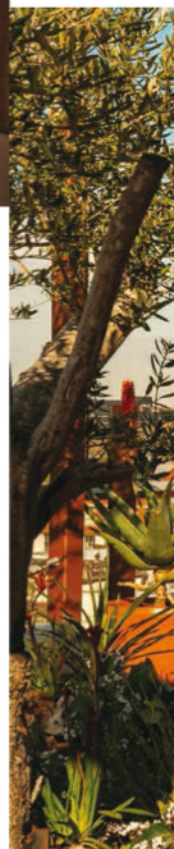
The EVE Hotel Sydney is more than a stylish new stay – it's a microcosm of Redfern's creative energy and Sydney/Warrane's ever-evolving cultural landscape. Set within the heritage Wunderlich Lane precinct, The EVE blends biophilic design with thoughtful nods to the area's past. Sip cocktails at Bar Julius or settle in for a long lunch at Lottie, where authentic Mexican flavours meet premium Australian produce. It's a stay designed for lingering long after you've closed your suitcase.



6

A long weekend at sea

The concept of a weekend cruise has gained popularity in recent years, as the world's best cruise lines make their way Down Under for the summer season. A two-night weekender onboard Royal Caribbean's *Anthem of the Seas* (January/February 2026) offers the chance to bliss out on a sea day between porting in Sydney/Warrane, while a three-day sampler onboard *Voyager of the Seas* (December to March) offers the same opportunity from Brisbane/Meanjin. Princess Cruises offers similar two-day 'seacations' sailing between Sydney and Brisbane (November 2025). Or make an extra-long weekend of it, sailing five nights from Sydney on Celebrity Cruises' award-winning *Celebrity Edge* (pictured), taking in Eden on NSW's Sapphire Coast and Hobart/Nipaluna (November 2025). It might just prove the ideal reset between busy working weeks.



R&R in the Blue Mountains

Treat yourself to a luxury weekend in the tranquil surrounds of Spicers Sangoma Retreat, perched in the Bowen Mountain landscape of NSW's Blue Mountains National Park. Lush bushland, sandstone cliffs and the sounds of native birdlife set the scene for deep relaxation. Indulge in spa treatments at Spa Anise, savour hatted dining at Restaurant Amara, float in the heated infinity pool or wander bush trails. It's a secluded haven designed for restorative escapes.



WORDS: IMOGEN EVESON (WEEKEND CRUISE); EMILY MURPHY (REMAINING); PHOTOGRAPHY: GEORG ROSKE (THE EVE HOTEL INTERIOR); MICHEL VERDURE (CELEBRITY EDGE); DESTINATION NSW/JEM CRESSWELL (SPICERS SANGOMA RETREAT)



Join the cool set at this new Fitzroy stay

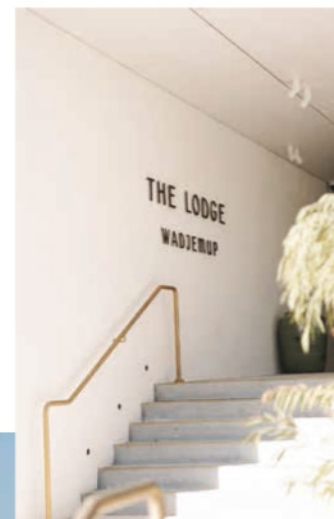
Melbourne/Naarm's oldest neighbourhood is a hub of contrasts: designer boutiques and fine-dining restaurants sit alongside graffitied terrace houses, tattoo parlours and historic pubs. Now, the world's first StandardX hotel is drawing travellers out of the CBD and into the heart of Fitzroy. Its location, tucked behind the main drag across from Rose Street Artists' Market, is prime for exploring Melbourne's hidden art scene. You can't walk a block without spotting a building-sized mural or painted stencil underfoot. To truly appreciate it, join a Street Art Tour with Blender Studios. You'll never look at a tag the same way again.

9

Cast away on Perth's favourite island

Grinning quokkas? Check. Sixty-three perfect-smile beaches? Yep. A flash new way to spend the night? Well actually, yes. The opening of The Lodge Wadjemup may just unlock the insatiable demand for sandy-footed weekend getaways on Rottnest Island/Wadjemup. The \$40 million redevelopment will add 102 rooms to Perth/Boorloo's favourite dot on the horizon once works are finished mid-May. More than half are already open, earning the resort global kudos as the only Australian hotel included in *TIME* magazine's 2025 *World's Greatest Places* list.

WORDS: KATIE CARLIN (FITZROY); FLEUR BAINGER (THE LODGE WADJEMUP); PHOTOGRAPHY: SHOT BY THOM (INTERIOR AT THE LODGE WADJEMUP); RHIANNON TAYLOR (STANDARDX HOTEL)





SHORT STAY ULTIMATE GETAWAY



**BEST CONTEMPORARY
CRUISE LINE**
Cruise Passenger Readers' Choice Awards 2023

**MOST TRUSTED
CRUISE OPERATOR**
Reader's Digest Australia 2022

**2025 WINNER
QUALITY SERVICE**
Readers Digest Awards

**BEST FOR
ACTIVITIES**
Cruise Passenger Readers' Choice Awards 2022



Cocktails at the adults-only Solarium



Night-time entertainment



 Massage at VitalitySM Spa



Broadway musical,
 *We Will Rock You*

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ALL THIS INCLUDED



All
Main Meals*



All
Entertainment



Adults-only
Solarium



Fitness
Centre



Most Onboard
Activities



Kids &
Teen Club



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*T&Cs Apply. Some food, beverages and activities incur an additional cost. Amenities vary by ship.

CITY sojourns

With stylish new stays, VIBRANT creative scenes, world-class dining and fabulous festivals, our cities set the *STAGE* for a great escape.



10

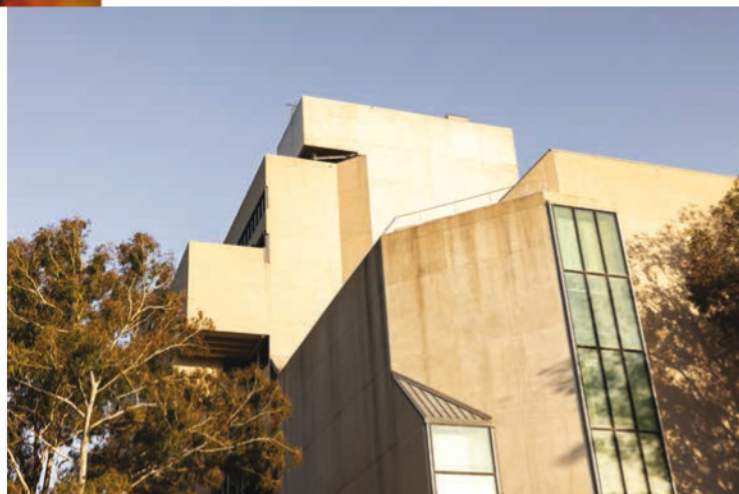
Midwinter dalliance at Dark Mofo

A staple of our cultural calendar for more than a decade, Dark Mofo returns to Hobart/Nipaluna in full force this year (5-15 June). Whether you gorge yourself on Tassie produce at the decadent Winter Feast (pictured), have your mind and ears blown by its progressive live music and arts program, celebrate winter solstice by plunging naked into the chilly River Derwent, get in touch with your inner pagan at the burning of the Ogoh-Ogoh or all of the above, there's no other festival like it in Australia.

11

Capital ideas in Canberra

Canberra has been thrust into the limelight over the past few decades due to the world-class exhibitions on show at landmark attractions such as the National Museum of Australia (pictured). You must visit the Australian War Memorial at least once, as the reimagined institution continues to evolve and expand to tell Australian stories of service and sacrifice. There's also plenty to keep food-focused travellers in Canberra with its plethora of award-winning restaurants, cafes, bars and vineyards.



13

The place to be in Melbourne

Melbourne Place has become the new must-stay hotel since throwing open its doors at the end of 2024. Sandwiched between the urban delights of Bourke and Little Collins streets, the 14-storey hotel on Russell Street rivals the world-class dining on its doorstep with three onsite hospitality venues: Med-inspired terrace restaurant Mid Air, Portuguese diner Marmelo and late-night basement bar Mr Mills. Inside, rooms are drenched in soothing colour palettes of burnt orange, rose and moss, embellished with bouclé armchairs, brass fixtures and floor-to-ceiling wraparound windows.



12

See Adelaide on foot

Take your visit to Adelaide/Tarntanya one step further along the new Adelaide100. The trail loops around the SA capital for more than 100 kilometres, taking in its coastline, waterways and hills. Its founder Jim McLean took more than a decade to develop the trail, inspired by the 100 square-mile parcels of land that were marked out during the city's founding in the 1800s. Tackle short sections or walk the entire Adelaide100 in about six days.



14



A run for your money in Brissie

Fitness tourism is on the rise around Australia and the Queensland capital is streaking ahead with its packed sporting calendar. Running over the Gateway Bridge in Brisbane/ Meanjin gives visitors the chance to view the city as they've never seen it before. Start training now for the annual Bridge to Brisbane fun run on 8 September, which has five-kilometre and 10-kilometre race options. Once you've crossed the finish line at Brisbane Showground, make your way to the King Street precinct to refuel with a Kuhl-Cher coffee or big-ass burger at Super Combo.

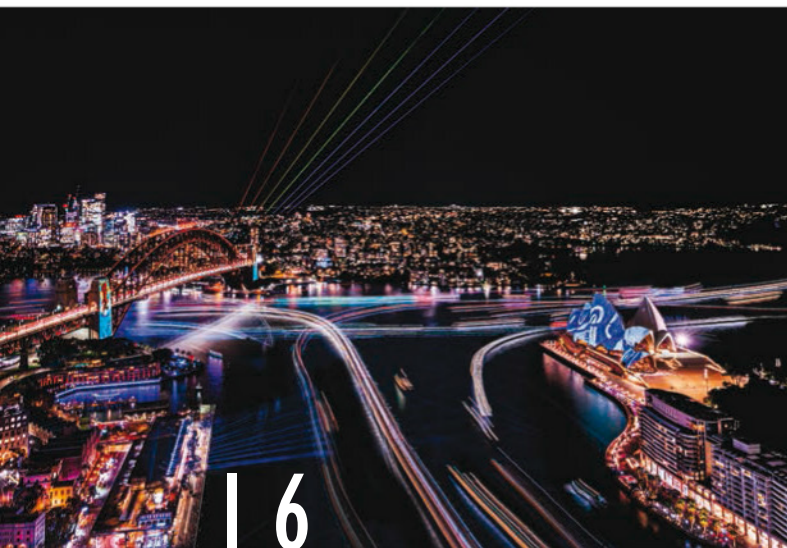


15

Perth on the rise

Singled out by *TIME*, *BBC Travel* and *New York Times* in their respective best places to travel in 2025 lists, Perth/Boorloo is sizzling – and not just with sunshine. The WA capital will soon welcome a host of new hotels, including Australia's first Hyde Hotel, Garde Hotel in the UNESCO-listed Fremantle Prison Heritage Precinct and The Elizabeth Hotel and Residences, which will seriously up the luxury stakes at Elizabeth Quay.

There's also a new yoga experience at Perth Zoo, a kooky beachside cafe called Magic Apple (pictured) doing bentonite clay and sea buckthorn-packed smoothies, and the first Light Years Asian Bar & Diner to open on the West Coast.



16

Sydney shines in winter

Sydney/Warrane is synonymous with summer but shines just as bright in winter. Sparkling days transition into colourful nights during Vivid Sydney, which illuminates Sydney Opera House and other landmark buildings around the city. This year's festival runs from 23 May to 14 June and includes talks, live music and foodie events designed to spark ideas and inspiration. Check into Park Hyatt Sydney on the edge of the harbour to stay in the heart of the action.

17

Detour to Darwin

Darwin/Garramilla's emergence as a cool urban getaway has been gradual. But as the gateway to the wonders of the Top End, it was only a matter of time before the city became a destination unto itself. Have a cocktail at The Trader Bar, shop at the House of Darwin flagship store (pictured left), visit Laundry Gallery (right) in hip hood Parap and time your visit to coincide with Darwin Festival (7–24 August). Return for the 2026 opening of the Northern Territory Art Gallery.



In partnership with Visit Newcastle

LEARN TO SAIL ON NEWCASTLE HARBOUR

The harbour has always shaped Newcastle, so it seems like the most obvious place to start your weekend. NEWCASTLE CRUISING YACHT CLUB offers a range of programs that provide instruction for both novice and experienced sailors. It's an inspired classroom that sets off past the Honeysuckle Foreshore up the Hunter River, with views towards a seemingly infinite vista of blue that stretches out to the horizon. Other water activities include surfing, swimming in one of the iconic ocean baths or whale-watching with COASTXP.

After dark

Newcastle is boomtown for its great bars. Follow the lively sound of the saxophone bubbling up to street level from THE UNDERGROUND.

This popular basement bar, with its dim lighting and speakeasy aesthetic, schedules live jazz jams every Tuesday and Thursday.

The late-night New York-style bar is, like the city itself, approachable and sophisticated. The vibey after-dark venue, which also hosts everything from wine dinners to whisky masterclasses, is designed for visitors who are in search of the offbeat.

SEEKING OFFBEAT

Discover *VIBRANT* culture and creativity, gorgeous *NATURE* spots and more in *LIVELY* Newcastle.

Newcastle/Muloobinba has a lot going for it beyond its big skies and beautiful wild beaches. From its after-dark experiences to its street art, harbour happenings and contemporary New Annual festival, here's our insider's guide to the NSW city of Newcastle.

CELEBRATING NEWCASTLE'S CREATIVITY

Circle 26 September – 5 October on your cultural calendar for NEW ANNUAL, a festival of art, music and ideas. The program is jam-packed with 10 days of art, culture and creativity. The family-friendly festival celebrates everything from themes of migration to community and belonging through mediums as diverse as music, workshops, panels and performances. Visitors to the compact city will find a concentration of events within a small radius, all of which are within easy walking distance or accessible via the light rail.



Read more at visitnewcastle.com.au

THE CITY AS A CANVAS

THE ALLEYWAYS AND BACKSTREETS OF NEWCASTLE ARE AN OUTDOOR ART GALLERY; YOU CAN FIND LARGE-SCALE STREET ART BY ARTISTS SUCH AS FINTAN MAGEE, INARI MEYERS AND SOPHIA FLEGG. THE CITY IS ALSO HOME TO AN ECLECTIC ARRAY OF ARTISTS WHO GRAVITATE TOWARDS DIFFERENT MEDIUMS. SEE THEIR WORKS ON DISPLAY AT INDEPENDENT GALLERIES SUCH AS THE LOCK-UP, WHICH OPERATED AS A POLICE STATION FROM 1861 UNTIL 1982, AND LIGHTHOUSE ARTS NEWCASTLE, FOUND IN THE LIGHT-FILLED COTTAGES ON NOBBYS HEAD/WHIBAYGANBA.



18

Explore Margaret River through a glass

Pair'd is Margaret River on very classy steroids. The new wine festival marries the magic of tall karri tree forests with the purity of maritime breezes over vineyards – and provides that extra nudge you need to book a weekend away. The inaugural 2024 event saw former Noma head chef (and Margaret River resident) Ben Ing rub shoulders with Blur bassist Alex James (who spun a sunset soundtrack as crayfish rolls were served on the sand), along with Burnt Ends' Dave Pynt and Attica's Ben Shewry. The festival celebrates WA's bounty, such as crayfish (pictured right), and is one of the state's most coveted foodie events. It returns 20–23 November.



Epicurean ESCAPES

From celebrations of BOUNTY in beachside locales to *CULINARY* experiences in remote reaches, let food and wine be your guide to *EXTRAORDINARY* places.

19

Pair two of SA's best wine regions

Compare tasting notes of two of the country's best wine regions during the ultimate indulgent weekend. Stop by McLaren Vale first, with a Small Batch Wine Tour and a few nights at Beresford Estate. Request a visit to the historic cottage that houses Sherrah Wines, Bondar Wines and Lino Ramble (pictured left), where you can meet the winemakers themselves. Ninety minutes away in the Barossa Valley, add Alkina Wines and Langmeil Winery to big-name estates – such as Seppeltsfield and Penfolds (below) – before retreating to your eco-friendly accommodation at The Villas.



20

Take a Top End culinary journey

Hungering for adventure? Head north to join a culinary safari hosted by acclaimed chef James Viles at luxury lodge Bamurru Plains on the fringes of Kakadu National Park. Wild Tastes of the Top End (16–19 June; pictured below) invites guests to forage and tuck into curated menus starring native ingredients and locally sourced produce (think wild duck, buffalo rib, threadfin salmon and crocodile) distinct to this unique Australian ecosystem. Or time your Top End visit for Karrimanjbeekan An-me Kakadu – Taste of Kakadu (23–25 May; above), the ultimate bush food experience.



21

Plate up on the Sunshine Coast

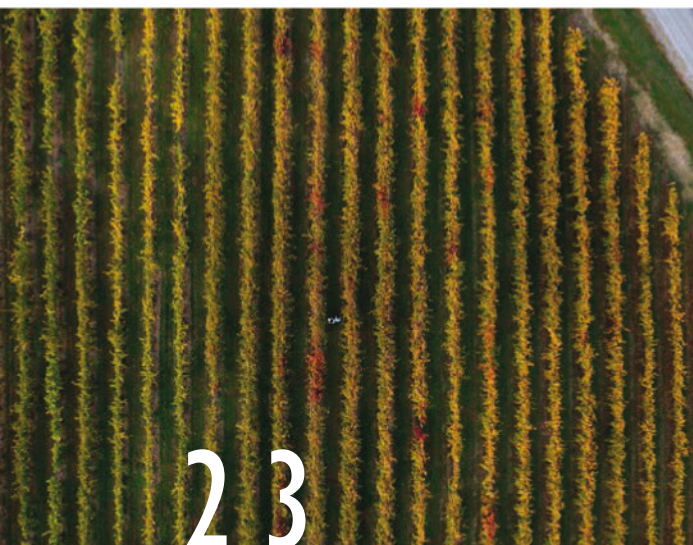
The 2025 iteration of The Curated Plate will again draw foodies from around Australia for the annual celebration of culinary excellence on Queensland's Sunshine Coast. Chef and TV presenter Peter Kuruvita has come onboard as culinary director for the 10-day festival held from 25 July to 3 August. The program includes pop-up panels, cooking demos, workshops, farm tours and one-of-a-kind feasts. The debut of Mooloolaba's Seafood Series will see fresh, sustainable and wild-caught seafood highlighted through events such as a First Nations-themed seafood experience with Saltwater Eco Tours (pictured above) and a Grape vs Grain degustation at Fish on Parkyn (right).



Feast on sea and land in Tassie

If travel is about special moments, then this is certainly one for the history books. Analiese Gregory, formerly of Michelin-starred Le Meurice in Paris and Quay in Sydney/Warrane, is considered to be one of Australia's most interesting chefs. Gregory recently teamed up with fellow Huon Valley local and food stylist Michelle Crawford to deliver an extravagant five-course lunch for the lucky ducks onboard Silversea's *Silver Nova*. Hosted at Crawford's studio, event space and B&B, The Bowmont, it was an exquisite affair starting with ridiculously good platters of Tasmanian seafood stacked high with oysters, lobster, periwinkles, kingfish ceviche and locally harvested vegetables fashioned into crudites. Gregory toiled over a fire in the garden to produce scallops with wakame butter, grilled octopus with pickled currants and macadamias on hummus, and a leg of local lamb. A whopping trifle was wheeled out to finish off the feast. The lunch was part of Silversea's S.A.L.T. (Sea and Land Taste) program, which delivers exclusive food and wine experiences on land and at sea. *Silver Nova* will return to Australia in October 2025 for a circumnavigation of Australia (see page 133).





23

Toast to ACT's new wine festival

Raise a glass to the inaugural National Wine Festival of Australia designed to showcase wines produced by some of the country's most talented viticulturalists. The festival, held from 12–15 June in Canberra, marks the 50th birthday of the National Wine Show of Australia and is set to attract everyone from glass-half-full travellers to serious oenophiles. The program will include masterclasses on everything from a beginner's guide to wine tasting to Australian sparkling. Extend your stay to explore the scores of vineyards on Canberra's doorstep, such as Brindabella Hills Winery (pictured above).



24

Seek the new in Newcastle

Bistro Penny, Frenchie, Susuru, Meat & Grain Steakhouse, The Del, LOLAS, Crumb and Roxanne are all new places to pin to your map app on your next visit to Newcastle/Muloobinba. While most of the NSW city's hotspots are showcased during its annual Newcastle Food Month in April, you can still build your own itinerary and connect the dots between venues such as Humbug (pictured above), Flotilla, Jana and Elementa, all of which position Newie as an epicurean escape.



25

Queensland's hidden-gem wine region

Be blown off the course of the usual Queensland itinerary by exploring the highest wine-growing region in the country. Meander between wineries, quaffing well-crafted and rare drops in the Southern Downs and Granite Belt, less than three hours south-west of Brisbane/Meenjin. There's still shiraz and the like, but you'll also find almost every cellar door – such as Balancing Heart Vineyard (pictured left) – decanting a much scarcer saperavi, fiano or carménère. Stay in a Girraween Environmental Lodge bush chalet, surrounded by Girraween National Park (right).



26

An abundance in Orange

The charming heritage town of Orange, on the Traditional Lands of the Wiradjuri people in NSW, is surrounded by cool-climate vineyards and rolling farmland. The region is home to Australia's longest-running food festival, Orange F.O.O.D Week (held in autumn) which includes highlights such as the Hillside Harvest lunch (pictured left). All up, the region has more than 80 vineyards and over 30 cellar doors. It's also considered one of the jewels of the NSW Central West for its abundance of boutique stays. The town is buttressed by Mt Canobolas/Gaanha Bula, which attracts hikers, birdwatchers and nature lovers.



WORDS: LARA PICONE (GRANITE BELT); CARLA GROSSETTI (REMAINING); PHOTOGRAPHY: TOURISM AND EVENTS QUEENSLAND/REUBEN NUTT (GIRRAWEE NATIONAL PARK); KIRSTEN CUNNINGHAM PHOTOGRAPHY (ORANGE F.O.O.D WEEK); TOURISM AUSTRALIA/MARTIN OLLMAN (BRINDABELLA HILLS WINERY); DOM CHERRY (HUMBUG, NEWCASTLE)

In partnership with Destination Central Coast



GROWN, GATHERED, GOURMET

Underpinned by grassroots hospitality and award-winning ORGANIC produce, the Central Coast's gastronomy scene is thriving as it becomes one of the best destinations for *EPICURES*.

Revered for its rugged natural splendour and laid-back seaside charm, the Central Coast's 80-kilometre coastline has long taken the spotlight – but its gastronomy has been quietly simmering in the background. From fresh-as-it-gets seafood and juicy organic citrus you can pluck yourself, through to regenerative farming and paddock-to-plate dining, this coastal gem is a blissful foodie mecca – and just an hour north of Sydney.

SHUCK OYSTERS

Pristine waters and nutrient-dense estuaries make the Central Coast the perfect breeding ground for oysters. Learn about farming and shucking at SYDNEY OYSTER FARM TOURS, where you can feast on oysters while wading through calm river waters. Tour the HAWKESBURY RIVER OYSTER SHED's saltwater paddocks by boat to uncover the distinct

characteristics of the Sydney rock oyster and creamy Pacific oyster, or jump on a one-of-a-kind guided pearl farming tour with BROKEN BAY PEARL FARM.

PICK CITRUS

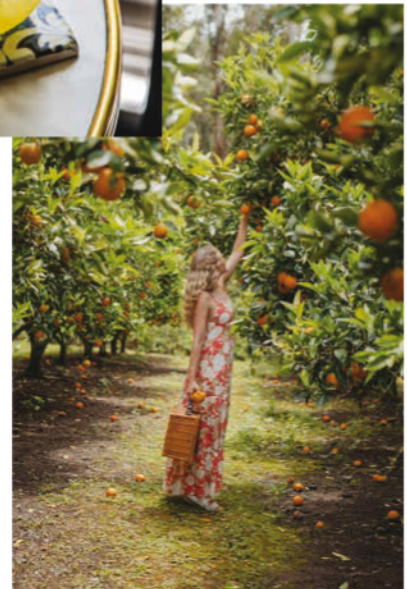
Abundant with orchards and agriculturally rich farmland, the Central Coast's hinterland is a ripe playground. Pick your own oranges, limes, lemons and avocados at family-owned MELIORA FARM in Peats Ridge, tour the citrus farm and factory to learn about the cultivation of high-quality ingredients at EASTCOAST BEVERAGES or pick your own bag of navel oranges at Dooralong's CEDAR FARM.

GO ORGANIC

Sustainability is at the heart of the Central Coast's produce farms. THE FOOD FARM in Wyong Creek believes good food is worth both the work and the wait; swing by and try some of its slow-grown quality meat cuts and pasteurised eggs from its 'honesty' farm shop. FANELLI ORGANICS is keeping the spirit of generational organic farming alive with its true home-grown operation. Take home its seasonal produce, like purple Dutch carrots and Tuscan kale, at LIKE MINDS MINI FARMERS MARKET at Avoca Beach every Wednesday afternoon, or pop by its 45-hectare farm at Mangrove Mountain.



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: *Saddles Mount White* is a destination diner on the Central Coast; Linger over lunch at *The Wild Flower Bar & Dining at Bells at Killcare*; Expect paddock-to-plate fare at *Saddles Mount White*; Visit orchards like *Cedar Farm*, where you can pick your own fruit; *Broken Bay Pearl Farm* produces fresh oysters and locally grown pearls.



Paddock-to-plate dining

The Central Coast is home to several reputable paddock-to-plate restaurants. At *SADDLES MOUNT WHITE*, savour rustic, country-style cuisine on the expansive verandah – try the hearty beef brisket pie with confit garlic potato purée and rainbow chard. Indulge in a sophisticated slice of luxury at *BELLS AT KILLCARE*; here, you can sample the freshest oysters and caviar from its raw bar and tuck into standout dishes – like roasted Wollemi duck with grilled leeks, rocket, grilled grapes and 10-year-aged balsamic – before roaming the picturesque kitchen gardens, wine in hand.

Visit lovecentralcoast.com

WORDS: ELISE CULLEN; PHOTOGRAPHY: DESTINATION NSW (SADDLES MOUNT WHITE); NIKKI TO (BELLS AT KILLCARE); JAMES HORAN (BROKEN BAY PEARL FARM)



27

Make port at Port Stephens

The topography of Port Stephens spoils visitors with a veritable buffet of natural beauty, offering everything from shifting sand dunes to holiday-brochure beaches and lushly forested hikes. Being just two-and-a-half hours from Sydney/Warrane also makes this Pacific-facing town a win. In fact, so bequeathed with enchantments is Port Stephens that it recently won Wotif's 2025 Aussie Town of the Year. Check into the marina-edged Anchorage to check out the allures of this coastal hamlet.



REGIONAL

From RAIL TRAILS connecting the dots between *TOWN* and country to hinterland gems and headlining ART, travelling regional Australia is the *ULTIMATE* choose-your-own adventure.

r o a m i n g

29

Taste the terroir in the Coal River Valley

Tasting Tasmania/Lutruwita's terroir is a gentle way to explore the Coal River Valley. While you can enjoy a river-sledding adventure or hire bikes to see the valley on two wheels, a cellar-door experience at Tolpuddle Vineyard is the ultimate celebration of the landscape. Visit the sleek, new tasting room on the Traditional Lands of the Mumirimina people to taste award-winning vintages of chardonnay and pinot noir with the vintners themselves.



28

A Southern Highlands winter

Food, wine, art and outdoor adventures seem to be melded into the heart of the Southern Highlands in NSW. While the region attracts visitors year-round, the scene changes during winter, when cool-to-freezing temperatures inspire activities such as fireside dining and truffle hunting. Enjoy a curated picnic at Cuttaway Creek. Taste cool-climate wines at Dawning Day Farms. Congregate with friends at Ngununggula, Southern Highlands Regional Gallery (See the *Tender* exhibition until 15 June, pictured) before settling in for an intimate dining experience at Eschalot. Then, bunker down at The Pill Factory in Bundanoon.

*Explore Canberra's back garden*

Namadgi National Park makes up a whopping 46 per cent of the ACT's total land area. Join Dhawura Tours to see Indigenous rock art, look for wildlife such as wombats and lyrebirds and walk the Mt Tennent Trail to really immerse yourself in the landscape. Pitch a tent in the national park near a squiggle of the Gudgenby River at the northern end of the Australian Alps.



30

31

Hideaway in the Cairns hinterland

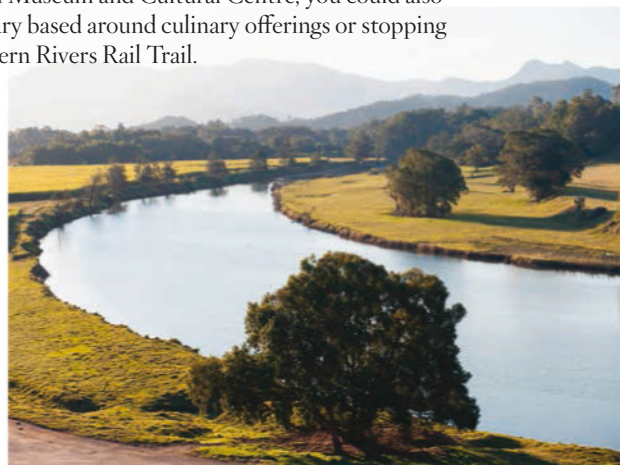
Head inland from Cairns/Gimuy to discover a Queensland region rich in heritage charm, outstanding natural beauty, and foodie and cultural attractions. The local farmers at the weekly Yungaburra Market sell produce grown in and around the Atherton Tablelands. Follow the crowds after the market, just 50 metres down the street, to Yungaburra Hotel. Take the pretty Peterson Creek walking track and try your luck at spotting the elusive platypus. North of Cairns, the vintage Kuranda Scenic Railway journeys through World Heritage-listed rainforest and past waterfalls to the hippie-chic village of Kuranda.



32

Coast, river and valley in the Tweed

The Tweed is the hip new regional getaway worth knowing about. The true heart of the Tweed in NSW lies in the fact it's got the trifecta of coast, valley and river. And while it's known for its landmark cultural attractions such as the Tweed Regional Gallery & Margaret Olley Art Centre and Minjungbal Museum and Cultural Centre, you could also tack together an itinerary based around culinary offerings or stopping points along the Northern Rivers Rail Trail.



33

Big reasons to visit Mandurah

Mandurah is having a moment. Originally known as Mandjoogoordap, meaning 'meeting place of the heart', the WA town was recently named third-best destination in Australia in the 2025 Wotif Aussie Town of the Year Awards. From above, the coastal city is all rippled cobalt and aquamarine. Stroll along its wide sandy beaches, soak up those big skies, then set off to discover the *Giants of Mandurah* sculptures, followed with fish and chips by the sea.



35

Tropical North Victoria gets a glow-up

Mildura was rebranded last year as Tropical North Victoria in a wink-wink campaign that nods to the abundance of sunny days in this regional city on the Murray River. New boutique hotel Kar-Rama sprinkles more Palm Springs vibes, with its modern interpretation of mid-century design making it the ideal oasis to retreat to after days spent visiting wineries, cruising the Murray and venturing into nearby Mungo National Park. And now, *Trail of Lights*, the latest large-scale experiential installation by British-Australian artist Bruce Munro, is providing another shining example of reasons to visit.



Cycle Victoria's High Country

A sprawling \$5-million trail network has opened in Rutherglen on Yorta Yorta Country. The Rutherglen Loops connect 14 cellar doors around the world-class wine region, making Victoria's High Country even more accessible for visitors. The four trails are like Venn diagrams with distinct loops that overlap everything from cellar doors and winery restaurants to the mighty Murray River and Lake Moodemere.

34

WORDS: IMOGEN EVESON (MILDURA); CARLA GROSSETTI (REMAINING); PHOTOGRAPHY: SERENA MUNRO (FIREFLIES BY BRUCE MUNRO); DUNCAN WRIGHT (SANTI/KTO, GIANTS OF MANDURAH BY THOMAS DAMBO); TOURISM AND EVENTS QUEENSLAND/TROPICAL NORTH QUEENSLAND/JAMES VODICKA (KURANDA SCENIC RAILWAY, ATHERTON TABLELANDS); DESTINATION NSW/TREVOR WORDEN (TWEED VALLEY); KAREN WEBB (RUTHERGLEN LOOPS)



NO TIME TO HIBERNATE

Whales breaching, *FIRES* crackling and slow-cooked *FEASTS* that make the cold so *COSY* one might wish it lasted longer – winter is no time to stay at home in NSW.

When the mercury drops, NSW comes into its own. Beaches are quieter, the air is crisper and hearty food tastes better when there's ice on the windows.

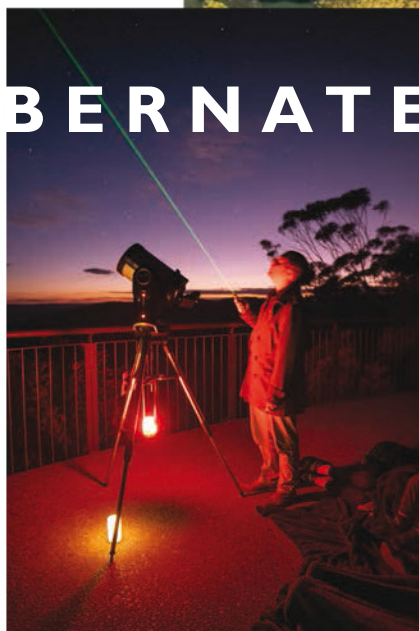
Winter here isn't for hiding away. It's for long walks, deep baths, deeper reds and the kind of fireside lounging that feels simultaneously indulgent and entirely deserved after a day of exploring. From whale-watching up north to moodily lit bushwalks and pastry pilgrimages, we've mapped out your new favourite season.

THE TWEED

In winter, the NSW north coast has a front-row seat to one of nature's greatest migrations. From May to November, humpbacks cruise past the Tweed coast between Antarctica and the Great Barrier Reef. Spot them from the Cabarita Beach headland or get up closer with a boat cruise.

Inland, browse the **TWEED REGIONAL GALLERY & MARGARET OLLEY ART CENTRE**, home to a rotating cast of big-name exhibitions (including Monet).

Later, grab a table at **BISTRO LIVI**, where the modern Spanish menu features whipped salt cod on toast and spanner crab with curry butter and spelt flatbread. Stick around to poke through the artist studios and indie boutiques of **M|ARTS PRECINCT**.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: *Admire works by famous artists in the Tweed; The striking Fairmont Resort Blue Mountains; Dine on sumptuous meals at Fairmont Resort; Discover celestial secrets in the Blue Mountains.*

Jump aboard the Indigenous Lunch Cruise with **TWEED ESCAPES**. You'll listen to yarns from local Indigenous guides, stop at the **MINJUNGBAL MUSEUM AND CULTURAL CENTRE** and tuck into lemon myrtle-crusted snapper.

Drive out to **FARM & CO** to pull apart juicy smoked lamb shoulder with green olive tapenade while gazing over the macadamia fields and avocado groves.

End the day at **MANTRA ON SALT BEACH** to enjoy beach access, a heated rock spa and a lagoon pool.

BLUE MOUNTAINS

The cold season is hands down the best time to visit the Blue Mountains – it's sunny enough for hikes but crisp enough at night for snuggling up.

For a trip that equally soothes and stirs, start with a meditative meander through the World



Heritage-listed national park's eucalypts and wildflowers. Brave the steepest passenger railway in the world, **SCENIC RAILWAY**, then hop on the **SKYWAY** aerial cable car for unrivalled views of the Three Sisters.

Thaw out at the **JAPANESE BATH HOUSE** in South Bowenfels. Soak in steamy outdoor onsens filled with natural mineral water and mountain views, wander the rose and zen gardens, or sip hot drinks in the tea house.

Afterwards, head to **ATES** in Blackheath, where meals revolve around the 150-year-old ironbark-fuelled oven, like the wood-roasted duck with nectarines and Szechuan spice. Or visit the experimental and sustainable **TEMPUS KATOOMBA**, which serves up dishes

In partnership with ALL.com & Destination NSW

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: *Explore Bowral's boutiques and antique stores; Explore the Nepean River by kayak; Take a winter dip; Historic Peppers Craigieburn Bowral.*



like braised fennel with cumin, spiced yoghurt and Aleppo pepper.

Rug up and head into the night with **BLUE MOUNTAINS STARGAZING**. Sessions are guided by astrophysicists, helping you understand what you're seeing in deep space.

Wrap it all up with a stay at **FAIRMONT RESORT BLUE MOUNTAINS - MALLERY COLLECTION**. There's a whiskey bar (and crackling fires that make a dram taste even better), several onsite dining options, indoor and outdoor pools and a day spa. Kids love the mirror maze and ice rink, too.

SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS

Good food and wine by the fire, experienced between sifting through second-hand treasures, is a winter vibe in Bowral.

Start at **DIRTY JANES**, a popular antique and vintage market. Recover from your shopping frenzy at **BENDOOLEY BOOK BARN**, where floor-to-ceiling shelves and a fire set the tone for an afternoon of red wine or hot coffee.

When it's time to eat, head to **HICKORY'S RESTAURANT & BAR**, onsite at **Peppers Craigieburn Bowral**. Try the crispy pork belly with Granny Smith crisps and apple gel, or ocean trout with wakame, lemon gel and pickled radish.

Another dining option, **ONESTA CUCINA**, does Italian with flair. For something more casual (with cocktails), **FLOUR BAR** swings between brunch and dinner, with an onsite bakery, over 400 wines and a hidden deli in an old bank vault.

Later, clamber Mt Gibraltar, where trails wind through eucalypt forest to views over Bowral and Mittagong. Stay at **PEPPERS CRAIGIEBURN BOWRAL**, a century-old estate featuring open fires, elegant lounges and a nine-hole golf course.

PENRITH

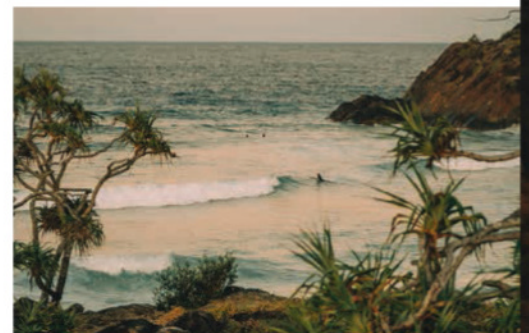
Shake off winter inertia with an adrenaline boost in Penrith. Kick things off with a kayak paddle on the Nepean River with **HORIZON LINE**, or visit **CABLES WAKE PARK**, where wetsuits take the edge off a wipeout.

For something a bit more cruisy, opt for the **NEPEAN BELLE PADDLEWHEELER** for slow-floating views and a hot cuppa.

Refuel at **MARCEL BAR & BISTRO**, where reimagined European comfort food – like seafood risotto in bisque with little neck clams and Moreton Bay bugs – is king. Later, head to **THEO'S ROOFTOP BAR**, where Penrith's newest sky-high spot slings sunset views and fire-pit vibes.

Check in at the **PULLMAN SYDNEY PENRITH**, the area's first international five-star hotel, and enjoy your well-earned rest.

Plan your NSW winter getaway at all.com





LUXURY retreats

From all-new OPENINGS to historic stays and *EXCLUSIVE* island hideaways, luxury in Australia means IMMERSIVE *EXPERIENCES* in extraordinary locations – with a few creature COMFORTS to boot.

Central Coast luxe: two ways

A pitch-perfect new lodge at a perennial favourite and an exclusive guesthouse secluded between beach and bush: this pair of luxury stays on NSW's Central Coast blends special occasion with relaxed intimacy.

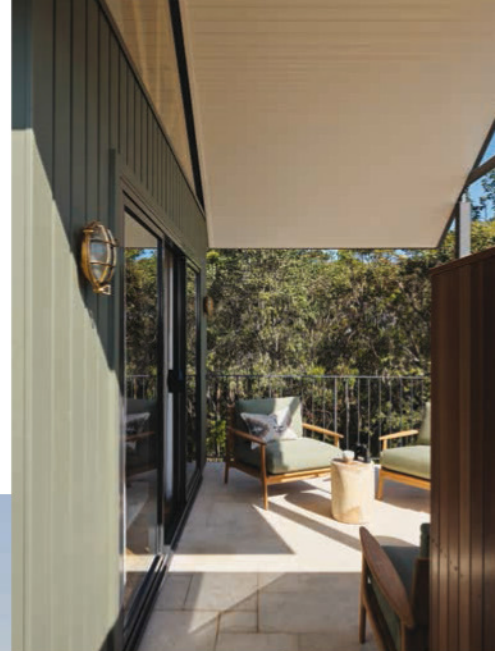
THE LODGES AT BELLS AT KILLCARE: NEW LEVELS OF LUXE

It's amazing how quickly we become accustomed to rituals. By the second and final night of our weekend away at Bells at Killcare, we've well and truly settled into our new evening schedule. The sun is setting over a watery scene where Pittwater, Palm Beach and the Hawkesbury River converge, framed by the bushland of Bouddi National Park. A dragonfly darts as we sip our drinks and snack on canapés delivered to our door just moments ago for this exact occasion. We're soaking in the scene from our third-level Sunset Deck, the *pièce de résistance* of The Lodges, launched in 2024 to bring a new level of luxury to this classic getaway location. It's one of those I-can't-believe-this-is-on-my-doorstep moments. For me and my partner, who have driven from Sydney/Warrane for the weekend. And especially for my in-laws, who live just 30 minutes away on the other side of the Central Coast.

Bells at Killcare has been a special-occasion place since it opened on NSW's Bouddi Peninsula in 2007. It is owned by husband-and-wife team Karina and Brian Barry, who bought the stylish retreat from Australian entrepreneur John Singleton in 2016. Guests have traditionally checked into its coastal-chic cottages and villas, which exude a Hamptons aesthetic with



FROM FAR LEFT:
Bells at Killcare's new lodges include freshly baked bread and a newspaper hung on the door each morning; Lounge on your day bed; Inside one of the stylish bathrooms; Water views from the Sunset Deck; The lodges are framed by bushland of Bouddi National Park.



their distinctive blue-and-white-striped interior palette, spread throughout tranquil gardens. They've also dined at its restaurant, The Wild Flower Bar & Dining. Indulged in a treatment at Bells Day Spa. Or picked up some fresh-baked goods from the onsite bakery. But the addition of The Lodges at Bells at Killcare has upped the ante further, with four luxurious tri-level lodges offering an elevated stay on par with nearby sister property and Luxury Lodge of Australia, Pretty Beach House.

The design of the lodges departs from the rest of the property's Hamptons aesthetic and, through a thoroughly modern lens, tunes into the local environment instead with natural tones, textures and details that reflect the surrounding coastal angophora canopy. There are robes and cushions made with upcycled truck canvas by Aussie lifestyle brand Pony Rider. Brass tapware, deep green tiles and a perfectly patinaed copper bartop I covet. Organic wooden accents and a plush woollen rug the colour of sand to sink my feet into.

On the ground floor, two bedrooms with mirrored footprints and each with its own en suite and balcony are rendered in a calming palette of stone and foliage tones. Bathrooms boast underfloor heating, a rain shower and a freestanding tub, as well as private access to our lodge's magnesium pool. Outside, a pair of

double day beds, outdoor rain rooms and a barbecue area. The second level opens up to a generous open-plan dining and living area, with a fully equipped kitchen and comfortable lounge area fixed with a fireplace for the cooler months, large-screen TV and sliding doors that lead to a wraparound terrace. And then there is the showpiece: the aforementioned third-level Sunset Deck. The overall layout of the space is cleverly conceived and perfect for friends, couples and families (including multigenerational groups like ours) looking for the right balance of privacy and conviviality.

Thoughtful touches abound: from the well-stocked bar to the fresh-baked house bread and choice of newspaper left in a woven basket by our front door every morning. All is delivered with laid-back, friendly professionalism by staff passionate about showing off this beautiful pocket of NSW.

As tempting as it is to avail ourselves of the lodge and nothing more, we waste no time in indulging in all Bells at Killcare has to offer: evening meals in the restaurant, massages and facials in the spa, and of course, setting out along the coastal paths threaded throughout the national park. While it's hard to check out, knowing this gem of a spot – the design-forward coastal digs of my dreams – is located just down the road is some consolation. *Imogen Eveson* →



PRETTY BEACH HOUSE: A WINTER-PERFECT BEACHSIDE STAY

I can see the steel-blue waters of Broken Bay on the horizon as I slip into the private plunge pool. It's the middle of August but the water is heated to perfection. On the surface, a beachside escape seems best reserved for the summer months, but Pretty Beach House manages to be an all-year-round retreat.

The guesthouse, part of the exclusive Luxury Lodges of Australia portfolio, is tucked into the treetops of the Bouddi Peninsula on the NSW Central Coast. My childhood years were spent a short drive from here, but seeing it afresh with my husband reminds me that even the familiar can surprise you. Yet, it's also the comforting feeling of home that instantly endears me to this place. From the warm welcome we receive as we're ushered onto the deck to enjoy Champagne and cocktails, to the casual chats we have around the open-plan kitchen with the chef as he prepares dinner, I can't help but feel at ease.

It's this highly personalised service that sees owners Karina and Brian Barry succeed where others fail.

The Retreat, a two-storey haven with wraparound deck, upstairs living area, two bathrooms, adjustable king-size bed with inbuilt massage, and plunge pool, is our home for the next two nights. *Breakfast in America* by Supertramp plays from the record player upstairs as I explore below. The heated pebbled floor in the en suite is reminiscent of a hot stone massage underfoot, the rain shower and oversized bathtub are welcome sights and lush green palm fronds fill the view outside the window.

I find myself quickly falling into step with the rhythms of this place. A schedule that's set around mealtimes. The intimate size of the property – it sleeps eight across four exclusive pavilions – means in-room dining is fast and efficient. Days start with breakfast in bed and afternoon cocktails paired with charcuterie boards on the balcony



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: *The main guest lounge of Pretty Beach House; Take a dip in the pool surrounded by angophora trees; The lodge is all-inclusive of gourmet meals and snacks; The bedroom of the Treetops Pavilion; The exclusive lodge has views out towards Broken Bay.*



become an evening ritual; the perfect welcome home after a day exploring the coastal trails of nearby Bouddi National Park.

Every meal that is sent from the kitchen of chef Dean Jones (formerly of London's Michelin-star River Cafe, famous for turning out chefs such as Jamie Oliver) is a lesson in simplicity. Even lettuce is elevated from a humble side to star-of-the-show in his hands. Baby cos is chargrilled over an open flame, drizzled in olive oil and dusted with parmesan.

Menus are designed daily around the seasons, filled with dishes inspired by locally sourced seafood, organic produce and native ingredients. Think sweet potato soup with spanner crab and toasted pepitas to start, followed by snapper then pork cutlets with a seeded mustard jus, and dark chocolate mousse topped with raspberries and a cashew crunch for dessert. All dietary and taste preferences can be catered for and the nightly degustation alongside wine pairings is an all-out occasion.

Guests can choose to dine in the main lodge dining room, in room or casually at the bar in conversation with the chef as he cooks. Warmer evenings allow for al fresco dining beside the poolside pizza oven. The open bar is stocked with premium wine, beer, spirits, cocktails and non-alcoholic beverages – I become mildly addicted to Buds & Beads sparkling tea (a joint venture between Karina Barry and her best friend). For a true treat (and an extra cost), select wine from the cellar, curated by Brian Barry.

I hear the cackle of a kookaburra nearby as I follow the trail down to Maitland Bay. We've been hiking for nearly three kilometres by the time we reach the sand, opting to do an out-and-back portion of the 8.5-kilometre Bouddi Coastal Trail that hugs the coast from Putty Beach to MacMasters Beach on our last day.

I spy a little pied cormorant sunning itself on a rock in the water below. Its wings outstretched, beak turned upwards to the sun, absorbing its warmth. It's a moment that perfectly captures how this weekend has felt, like a warm embrace. I put it down to the generous hospitality, nourishing food and luxury of time to unwind. I can't think of a better way to recalibrate in the winter than this pretty hideaway by the beach. *Katie Carlin* 📸

A traveller's checklist

Getting there

Located in neighbouring towns Killcare and Pretty Beach on NSW's Central Coast, these two lodgings are approximately a 90-minute drive north of Sydney/Warrane and south from Newcastle/Muloobinba.

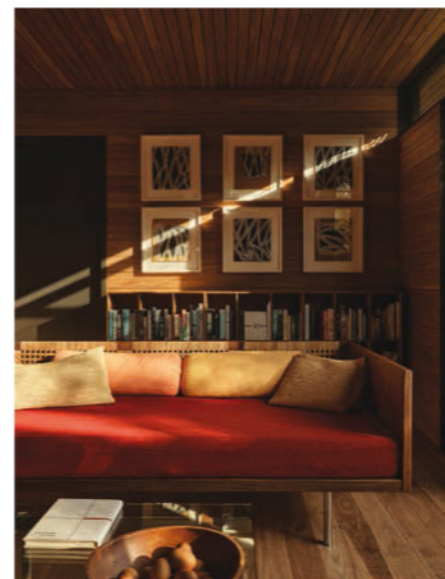
Staying there

THE LODGES AT BELLS AT KILLCARE are fully serviced residences. The Bed & Breakfast Package (\$2000 per night for four people) includes concierge service, daily housekeeping, nightly turndown, daily cooked breakfast, freshly baked bread and newspaper delivered daily, afternoon beverages and canapés delivered to your lodge, local transfers to the beach and walking trails. The All-Inclusive Package (\$2900 for four guests and \$2300 for two guests)

includes all of the above, as well as dinner and lunch (with the option of an Explorer's Backpack with all you need for a picnic feast whilst you're exploring Bouddi National Park). Packages include hotel credit. Children under 13 stay free of charge. Minimum two-night stay. bellsatkillcare.com.au

PRETTY BEACH HOUSE comprises four luxury pavilions, which start from \$2250 per night for two people. Pavilion rates include all dining, snacks, premium beverages and spirits (cellar list additional), in-pavilion snacks and refreshments, on-demand movies, unlimited wi-fi and mountain bike hire. Children under 13 are not permitted to stay, unless you exclusively book all four pavilions, which starts from \$9800 per night for eight people. prettybeachhouse.com





Set yourself to Lord Howe Island time

Fringed by evergreen Kentia palms and set under the guardianship of Mt Gower and Mt Lidgbird, Lord Howe Island is a forested arcadia rising from coral reefs. Just a two-hour flight from Sydney/Warrane, it's impossible not to fall into absolute relaxation here. Do so at the eco-luxe Island House with its beautifully considered North and South abodes built consciously from hardwood and copper. Sleeping eight guests in the art-festooned, oak-lined dwellings, guests will relish chef-prepared meals and unimpeded privacy.

Experience wild luxury at Arkaba

You'll find historic Arkaba Homestead folded into the dusty-green bush on the verge of South Australia's Ikara-Flinders Ranges National Park. The 1850s-era, five-guestroom homestead blends into the serenity of its rocky surrounds and offers a pause in luxury on the final night of the three-day Arkaba Walk into Wilpena Pound. But you needn't do the full walk to stay at this all-inclusive former frontier estate that offers twice-daily safari experiences for all guests.



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Cruise Tassie's coast

Aspirations of explorative adventure come cocooned in luxury with a new collaboration between Tasmania/Lutruwita's Saffire Freycinet and On Board Expeditions cruises. The six-night Coast-to-Coast discovery for 12 guests sees would-be wanderers deposited by seaplane into the remote south-west corner of Tassie's extraordinary wilderness. There, they board a luxury cruise for three nights, before being whisked back to the east coast to take in the heart-lifting beauty of The Hazards from Saffire Freycinet's beautifully crafted comforts.



40

Stay and spa at legendary Lake House

A little over 40 years ago, the late Allan Wolf-Tasker was tasked to quite literally build his wife's dream in Victoria's Daylesford. The owner of the dream was celebrated chef Alla Wolf-Tasker and since the realisation of the pioneering Lake House, the luxury lodge has earned 76-plus chefs' hats thanks to Wolf-Tasker's beautifully seasonal and artistic fare. The rambling grounds meander to a gentle lake, the studios are an expression of modern country elegance and the spa is full of luxurious rituals and treatments.



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THE 100

Luxury getaways

See a new side to Hamilton Island

Encircled by the Great Barrier Reef on Hamilton Island, qualia is compelling enough, but the luxe Whitsundays resort that perfected the laid-back style of Australian hospitality also drops jaws with its elegant suites, curated dining and soft-mauve sunsets. And now there's a persuasive reason to unpeel yourself from the sun lounger, with the resort's Cultural Island Discovery experience to Ngaro Country (pictured above). Join Robbie Congoo as he reveals Indigenous heritage through explorations of cave paintings, flora and fauna and storytelling. Elsewhere on the island, Hamilton's newest luxury hotel The Sundays (below) has opened, a fresh boutique offering designed with families in mind.



42

Check out the Mondrian Gold Coast

The gilding of the Gold Coast continues as the city's luxe inventory grows with the opening of the shiny-new Mondrian this June. Positioned for ample saturation of the Pacific's blue hues, this 208-key luxury hotel is achingly of-the-minute, with sweeping modern design that celebrates the Gold Coast's manicured aesthetic. Contributing to the buzz of hip Burleigh Heads, the Mondrian welcomes with a pool bar, all-day Italian diner, seafood restaurant and biowellness spa.



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Get lodged in the Kimberley

A landscape of high contrast, Western Australia's Kimberley region pins high on the inspiration board. From rough-hewn cliffs and quartzite waters to remote stations of parched beauty, the otherworldly topography is thoroughly bewitching on a luxury bush stay at Berkeley River Lodge, floating pontoon Jetwave Pearl and El Questro Homestead (pictured). The latter of which ensures surfaces are thoroughly scratched on a two-hour tour with a Traditional Owner, who guides you through the deep reverence local Ngarinyin people have for Country.



WORDS: LARA PICONE (PHOTOGRAPHY: LEAN TIMMS (CULTURAL ISLAND DISCOVERY); KARA ROSENBLUND (THE SUNDAYS); JUSTIN NICHOLAS (MONDRIAN))



Discover Sydney's Hidden Gem

Unique eco-retreat, immersive native animal experiences, modern Australian dining and stunning iconic harbour views.

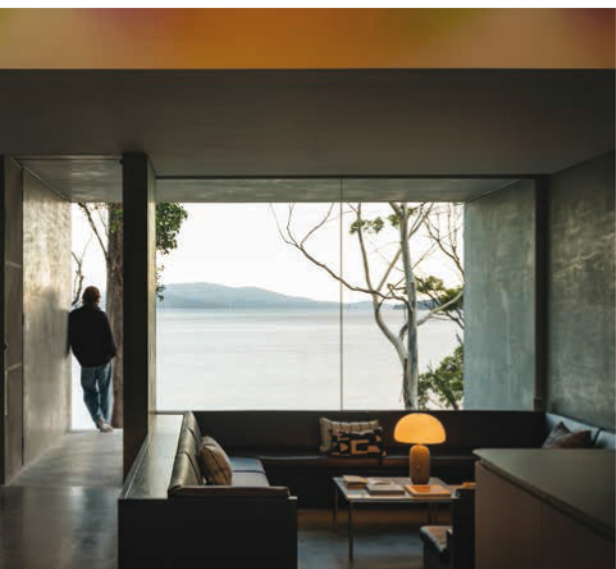


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taronga.org.au/wildlife-retreat





Tassie island-hopping

An island festooned with smaller outcrops anchored in pristine waters, Tasmania/Lutruwita has plenty of places where you can be entirely girt by sea. For excursions ex-Hobart/Nipaluna, ferry across to Bruny Island (pictured below) to indulge your inner gourmand and stay at the brutally sleek Vipp Tunnel (left). You can join Great Walks of Australia's newest multi-day hike on north-eastern Flinders Island. Or take in the wondrous wildlife and landscapes of Maria Island on its signature four-day walk and bed down for a night in the beautifully refurbished Bernacchi House. There's also petite Picnic Island in Freycinet and the luxe private Satellite Island (above), to name but a few.

COASTING along

Whether you CAST yourself away to a timeless *HOLIDAY* town, picturesque peninsula or off-grid *ESCAPE*, Australia's beaches, bays and ISLANDS are your ticket to EXPLORING our great outdoors.





45

South Australia's island icon

As far as playing island bingo goes, South Australia's Kangaroo Island has plenty to cross off your game card. There's inviting waters, white-sand beaches, photogenic landscapes, sea lions, history, wonderful produce and wine (which you can celebrate at Gutsy 2025 from 6–9 June), and luxury lodgings (such as the impeccable Southern Ocean Lodge or Wander, pictured above) to budget camping. It also has an intriguing sense of isolation that is all at once haunting and rejuvenating. The place to live out your cast-adrift fantasies, we're calling icon status on this Aussie treasure.



46

Off-grid luxury in Ningaloo

Sal Salis is designed to connect you to your surroundings: the placement of its tents captures the coastal breeze; light pollution restrictions mean views of star-studded night skies; and its location alongside the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Ningaloo Reef with its 700-plus species of fish, coral gardens and megafauna delivers unforgettable encounters. Travellers come here to swim with whale sharks, hike the ancient paths of Cape Range National Park and fall asleep to the sound of waves crashing against the fringing reef. There's nowhere else like it.





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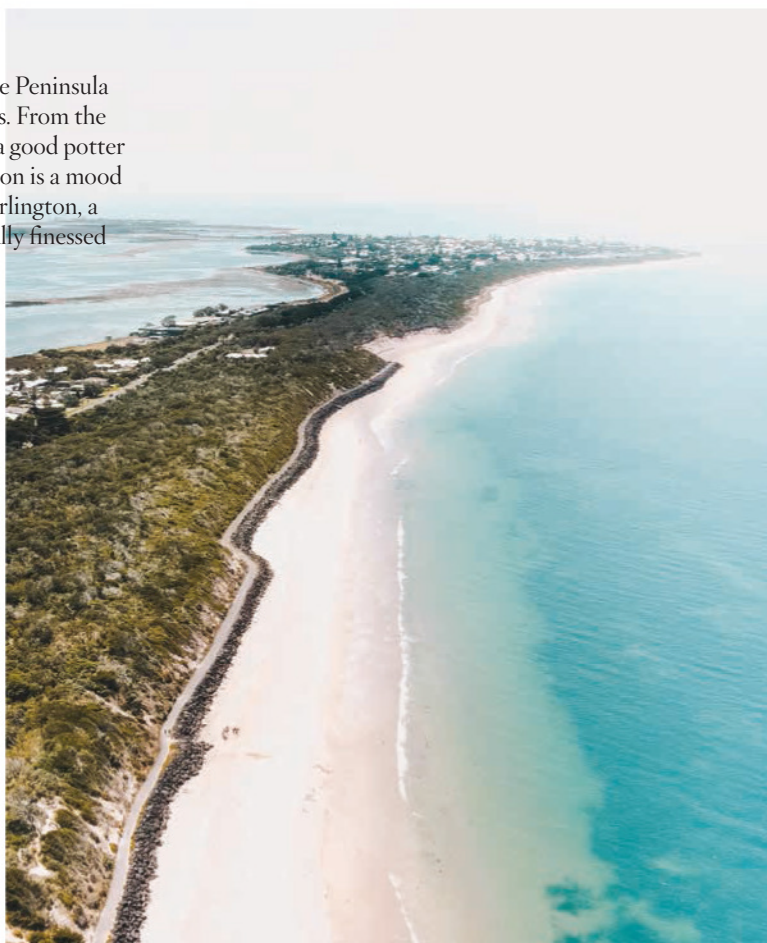
Explore Noosa's great outdoors

As a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and World Surfing Reserve, this Sunshine Coast region has a stunning and diverse natural environment that will have your eyes watering with the beauty and fragility of it all. Slap on your sunscreen for days spent outdoors on Kabi Kabi Country, from lingering on the golden sands of Main Beach to surfing the 'Points' and walking the scenic tracks in lush, forested Noosa National Park. Hiring a boat to cruise along Noosa River and the swirling sands of Noosa Spit and kayaking the wildlife-rich Noosa Everglades also make for immersive adventures.

48

Perfection on the Peninsula

A short jaunt from Melbourne/Naarm and Geelong, the Bellarine Peninsula often comes as a bit of a surprise for unsuspecting non-Victorians. From the passive waters of Phillip Bay to surfable beaches, towns worthy of a good potter around and unflinching vistas of the rollicking Bass Strait, this region is a mood board for holiday aspirations. Add to this a mussel tour at Portarlington, a summer dip in Point Lonsdale and an oceanside lunch at the locally finessed TARRA in Queenscliff (pictured).



WORDS: MEGAN ARKINSTALL (NOOSA); LARA PICONE (REMAINING). PHOTOGRAPHY: CHRIS MCCONVILLE (TARRA RESTAURANT); JEFF JULIA (ELEMENTS OF BYRON); TOURISM AND EVENTS QUEENSLAND/JUSTINE BATH (NOOSA AERIAL); TOURISM AND EVENTS QUEENSLAND/JUSTINE BATH (SURFERS); TOURISM AUSTRALIA (NORFOLK ISLAND); QUEENSLAND/JESSE LINDEMANN (TALLEBUDGERA CREEK BEACH); TOURISM AUSTRALIA (NORFOLK ISLAND)



Pining for Norfolk

Norfolk Island is an anomaly of absorbing beauty and astonishing history. As an external territory of Australia bobbing in the South Pacific, it's wholly unique with a swashbuckling culture descended from British mutineers of *The Bounty* and their Polynesian families. Windex-hued waters, coral reefs and austere cliffs make for a landscape of enrapturing beauty, while the island's Pitcairn culture is rich in community and warmth. Visit once and Norfolk will occupy space in your heart ever after.



50

Relive golden days on the Gold Coast

Suddenly a few kids deep and hankering for sunny, margarita-filled days?

It may never be the same, but the good news is the Gold Coast is here for this life phase. As the ultimate family destination for generations, the sun still shines, swimming spots such as Tallebudgera (pictured left) still sparkle and theme parks still beckon, from Dreamworld to Wet 'n' Wild. Stay at JW Marriott Gold Coast Resort & Spa or Dorsett Gold Coast for grown-up (but kid-friendly) fun.



51

The evergreen escape

Byron Bay's appeal retains its lustre in perpetuity. There are tangible reasons for this, such as easy access, indisputable beauty, good surf and an aesthetic that seems to embody coolness. There are also more esoteric reasons that are often clutchingly described as the 'Byron vibe'. Boutique accommodation has recently surged with plenty of mid-to-luxe options, but the reliably chill Elements of Byron remains a classic place to experience this 'vibe'.



NOOSA'S BEST-KEPT WINTER SECRETS

As the cooler weather rolls in, head to this **POPULAR** *SUNSHINE* Coast destination to enjoy the region's natural beauty, culinary **WONDERS** and mild temperatures.

Sure, it's a favourite destination for sun-seeking summer travellers, but as locals will readily tell you, winter is the best time to uncover Noosa's hidden gems. Not only is the weather mild and enjoyable, but the beaches and hinterland are picture perfect, too. You might even spot a whale or two if you visit from June to September.

Discover how to spend your winter surrounded by Noosa's stunning natural beauty.

CULINARY CREATIONS

Known for its dynamic cuisine, Noosa is a true foodie destination. Visit its classic restaurants, like lively beachfront **BISTRO C** (try the caramelised pork belly), popular **SEASON RESTAURANT** (order the spanner crab pasta) and stylish **LOCALE** (our pick is the slow-roasted White Pyrenees lamb shoulder).

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: Take in Noosa's postcard-perfect coastal scenes; Enjoy Italian cuisine at Lucio's Marina; Explore walking trails for stunning views in Noosa National Park.



There are also chic new restaurants offering tasty dishes, like Mediterranean fare at **PELIS**, Cantonese-inspired dim sum at **SABROSA**, **EL CAPITANO**'s organic sourdough pizzas, traditional recipes and tequila at **DONA COCINA MEXICANA** and modern Italian-Australian creations at **LUCIO'S MARINA**.

PILLOW TALK

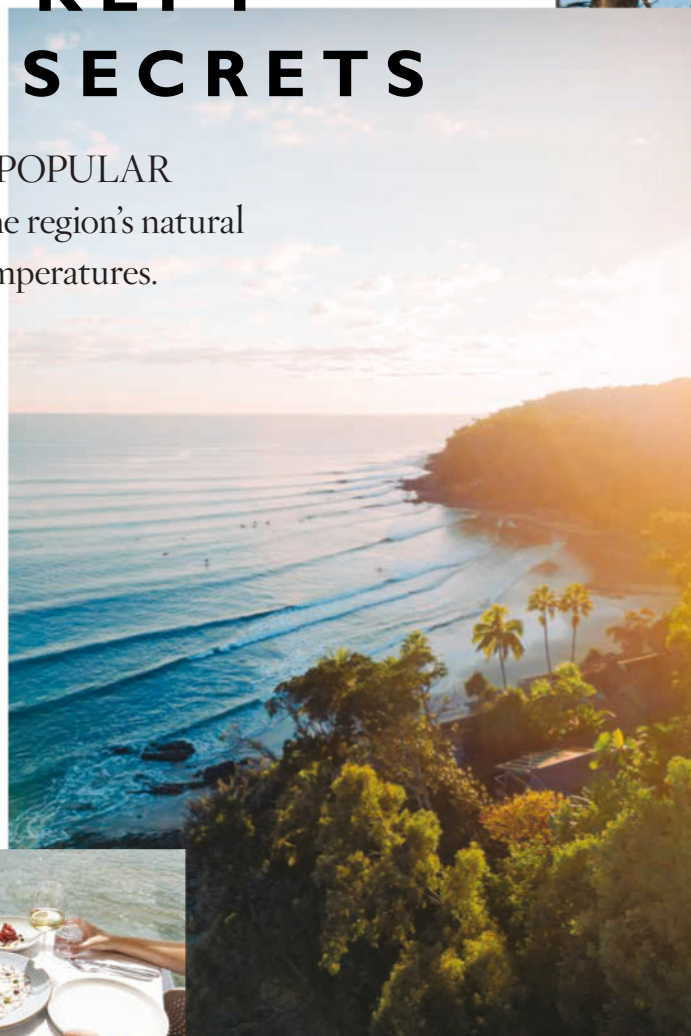
Once you're full, you'll need to find a place to lay your head, and Noosa has no shortage of accommodation options.

From five-star resorts with palm-fringed lagoon pools to self-catered apartments and family-friendly budget options, stays in the

heart of the action on Hastings Street to sleeping steps from the beach or in more relaxed accommodation along the river, Noosa has something for everyone.

There's the laid-back luxury of **NETANYA NOOSA** overlooking the beach, with studios, two- and three-bedroom apartments, or the family-oriented **IVORY PALMS RESORT** in Noosaville, which offers three pools, a jumping pillow and playground. Guests also love versatile **RACV NOOSA RESORT** and its numerous pools, waterslides and tennis courts.

For a wildlife experience, hop on a ferry and head to eco-friendly **SENSES NOOSA NORTH SHORE**. Surrounded by 16 hectares of native bushland, the beautiful architect-designed property blends indoor and outdoor living and offers three stunning pools and a spa.





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Beautiful Noosa National Park borders the translucent waters of the main beach; Paddle through the Noosa Everglades; Ride with Noosa Dreamboats for a different viewpoint.

Keep an eye out for friendly creatures from your shaded verandah, including kangaroos and rainbow lorikeets.

ON THE LAND

There's no denying it: Noosa's main beach – with its creamy-coloured sand, consistent breaks and epic coastline views – is the region's star attraction. But there's plenty to do away from the water, too.

Bordering the beach is the wildly popular Noosa National Park, which offers a range of diverse landscapes. You can explore over 15 kilometres of interconnected trails, including the Coastal Walk, Tanglewood Walk and Palm Grove Walk.

A short stroll away you'll find Hastings Street, which is full of life during the day and long into the night. Enjoy shopping at chic boutiques, a late brunch, dinner out and a cocktail as the sun goes down.

To get an insider's tour of the region, climb onto a fully electric tuk tuk for a tour with **NOOSA E-TUK TUKS**. For more in-depth exploration, book a bespoke tour with **JOEL'S JOURNEYS** and head to the lush green hinterland. Or discover the rugged landscapes of Great Sandy National Park with **SUNNY JEEPS**, where you can spend a glorious winter day with the wind in your hair and sand underfoot.



ON THE WATER

Noosa isn't just about the beach, the national parks and shopping; one of the most popular ways to embrace winter is to explore the region on water.

You could brave the waves on a surfboard, explore the languid Noosa River on a stand-up paddleboard, or head to the Noosa Everglades for a day adventuring on a boat, canoe or kayak.

Enjoy the winter sunsets aboard **NOOSA DREAMBOATS** or luxury hybrid-powered catamaran **HV STILLWATER** as it glides silently along Noosa's waterways. Book a table on the only local floating restaurant,

NOOSA CRUISER, to dig into freshly cooked cuisine with an unbeatable view.

For a little more adventure, head out with **KINGFISHER SAFARI CO** and cruise around Noosa River Inlet and Lake Cootharaba. Or search for whales and dolphins (from June to September) on a small charter boat tour with **WHALESONGS NOOSA**. With an onboard researcher to explain what you're seeing, as well as a hydrophone, you'll be able to listen to the haunting songs of some of the world's largest animals while enjoying a winter day in the sun.

Plan your winter trip at visitnoosa.com.au



EPIC journeys

These *EXPERIENCES* are often the type you *DREAM* of but never make happen. From *ICONIC* railways to *REMOTE* outback places and *WILD* treks, it's time to plan big.



WORDS: QUENTIN LONG. PHOTOGRAPHY: QUENTIN LONG (ON BOARD DINING ROOM) RYAN CANTWELL (DISHES AT SEPPELLSFELD)

52

A new chapter for an icon

What started as a pragmatic passenger train 50-plus years ago is now unquestionably one of the world's grandest journeys, full of unforgettable experiences. Quentin Long steps onboard.

THE *INDIAN PACIFIC* IS one of the few truly great transcontinental journeys in the world. And its five-day eastbound itinerary from Perth/Boorloo to Sydney/Warrane that launched this year abounds with a host of enticing new Off Train Experiences. Commencing alongside this itinerary is an all-new cabin class, Gold Premium, suffused with sleek design touches that reflect the landscapes the train journeys through. Onboard, there's ample time to enjoy excellent food, wine and superb service, but the *Indian Pacific* is so much more than that. It's a journey across the landscapes that have shaped the people in it, from the Traditional Custodians to industrial and agricultural pioneers.

To understand this country, its culture both ancient and modern, is to understand this landscape. In just five days onboard the *Indian Pacific*, you gain an intimate understanding. Here are just three memorable highlights from an unforgettable journey.

A DINNER FOR THE AGES

Long Plain is suitably named. This area 75 kilometres north of Adelaide/Tarntanya in the heart of endless wheat country on the Yorke Peninsula is within the wider Adelaide Plains region. In early autumn, there are very few undulations in the endless carpet of golden stubble, remnants of lush fields of wheat slashed last January.

The *Indian Pacific* eases to walking pace before an unexpected jolt, which is required to exhaust the inertia of a 25-carriage train that stretches further than the eye can

easily see. We disembark from the Gold Premium lounge carriage and transfer to a coach for the one-hour drive to Seppeltsfield. As we pass fields of wheat spiked with electric power poles that stand like sentinels, our driver Angus entertains with history and humour.

We toast to our good fortune with bubbles and gourmet popcorn as the Barossa sun sets over Seppeltsfield's manicured lawns, lined by some of the estate's iconic palm trees.

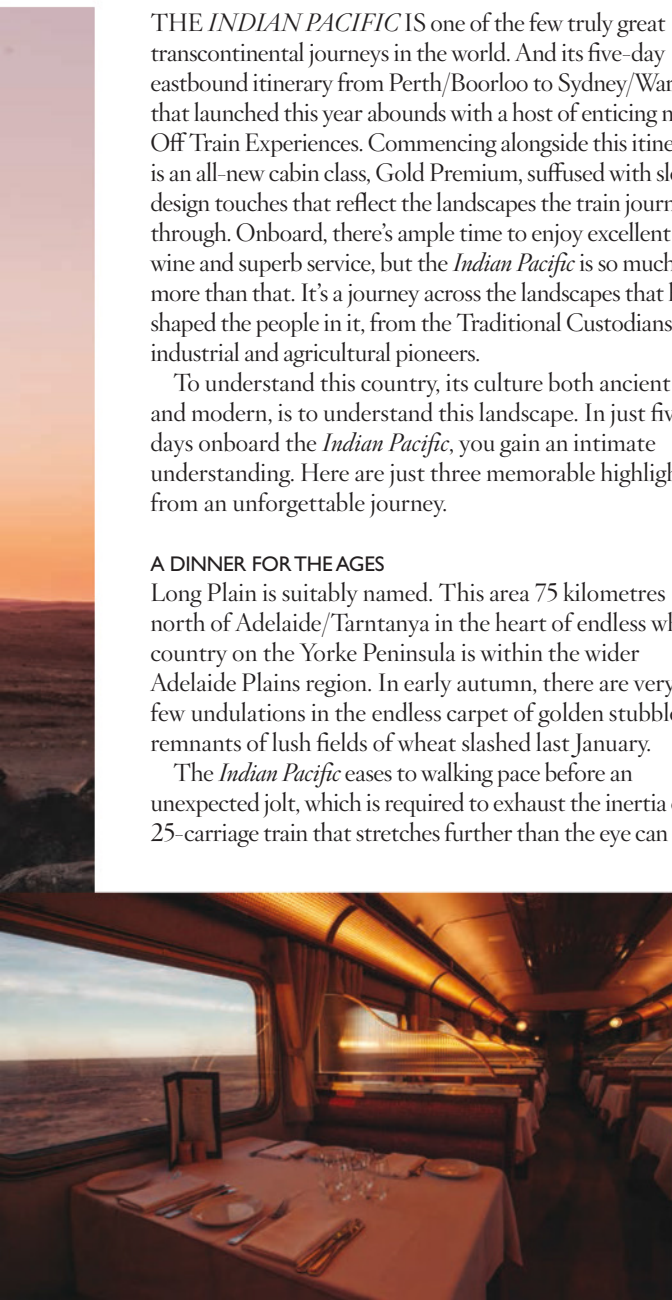
Inside the cavernous, corrugated iron shed that is the Barrell Room, strings of lights hover over six long tables, surrounded by barrels and a dance floor. It feels like a feasting hall for Vikings.

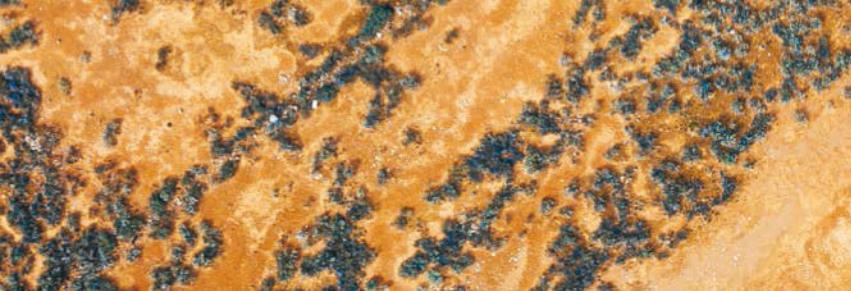
There are platters of eye fillet and pesto chicken paired with roast potatoes, honeyed carrots and a salad of leafy greens prepared by Owen Andrews, executive chef for Seppeltsfield. Bottles of iconic Barossa and Eden Valley shiraz are plentiful, and the port barrel-preserved cheese platter to finish is accompanied by an equally renowned Para Grand Tawny. A closely guarded bottle of 1925 Vintage Para Tawny sits on one of the bars, a rare nectar that guests can sip on for a fee.

After Seppeltsfield's master cooper, Andrew Young, fires up a flamethrower to demonstrate the art of turning a wine barrel into a whisky barrel, the band encourages guests to snake around the tables in a conga line. It's a feast of food, wine, song and dance.

The drive back to the *Indian Pacific* starts with much merriment and mirth but eventually peters out into a rhythmic soundtrack of snoozing. →

CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE: Pull into Broken Hill on an *Indian Pacific* journey; Slick service epitomises the romance of rail travel; The suite spot is Gold Premium; Roll out the barrel at Seppeltsfield Estate; Signature dining at Seppeltsfield is the Off Train Experience in the Barossa; The iconic train ushers in a new era of transcontinental travel; Watch the landscape roll by from the dining car.





OUTRAGEOUS OUTBACK

In a flurry of pastel pink, silver and turquoise sequins, Shelita Buffet exits a parked 4WD ute and pauses dutifully at the zebra crossing before striding in white high-heeled boots to greet waiting *Indian Pacific* guests at Broken Hill Station.

The local drag queen is all sass and fun while leading our merry band on a walking tour of the city, mixing its industrial history with a more contemporary context.

“The Royal Theatre is now the only nightclub in town; sticky floors and smells of disappointment,” Shelita quips. The establishment was the largest theatre outside of Sydney for a long time and has hosted some of Australia’s most celebrated musicians, including the band Cold Chisel.

Discussing the many movies that have been filmed in Broken Hill, Shelita is full of pithy commentary. “*Wake in Fright* is about a man who is stuck in Broken Hill drinking every day and can’t escape... it’s the story of my life.”

During Shelita’s show at The Old Brewery, I find out from her mother, who is serving drinks, that this is not entirely true. Shelita returned to Broken Hill from a life cheffing in Adelaide to create the brewery business and her show. Shelita’s builder brother assisted with the renovations and now helps Shelita into figure-hugging costumes between songs.

OVERWHELMED BY NOTHINGNESS

A few days earlier, the Nullarbor Plain crept into view as WA’s Great Western Woodlands receded. Then I watched from the comfort of the *Indian Pacific* as it flashed past like an endlessly flickering fire. A scene of vast stretches of red sand and shrubs was only occasionally interrupted by a flitting bird.

We lazed in the lounge car reading books and chatting with fellow travellers, or relaxed in our Gold Premium cabin. The lack of reception was a welcome enforced disconnect. I roused myself for afternoon tea and trivia, then lazed and lolled until dinner. I found the inescapable pace liberating.

We stopped later in Cook – in the middle of the Nullarbor and close to nothing – where we sat by a bonfire to partake in some late-night stargazing. This is Big Sky Country. I sipped on a glass of port, looking up into a quintessential outback vastness that seems to surpass all possibilities of landscape. **AT**



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: *The Broken Hill Pub*; *Shelita Buffet performs at The Old Brewery*; *Relaxing inside the Gold Premium Lounge*; *The famous Nullarbor Plain*; *Stop at the remote outback town of Cook*.
OPPOSITE: *The Indian Pacific cuts across the great Australian continent.*





A traveller's checklist

The **INDIAN PACIFIC** operates year-round between Perth/Boorloo and Sydney/Warrane. The five-day itinerary, introduced January 2025, departs from Perth on Saturdays and includes Off Train Experiences in Kalgoorlie, Cook, Broken Hill and the Blue Mountains, plus the signature dining experience at Seppeltsfield Estate in the Barossa Valley.

Alternatively, the four-day itinerary departs from Sydney on Wednesdays and includes Off Train Experiences in Broken Hill, Adelaide/Tarntanya and more. Prices start from \$2890 per person in a Gold Single cabin, all inclusive of meals, fine wines and beverages.

After launching on *The Ghan* last year, the **GOLD PREMIUM** cabin class has now been introduced on the *Indian Pacific*. This category between Gold and Platinum sees refurbished cabins with premium amenities, meals and wines. journeybeyonddrail.com.au



53

Live life on the land

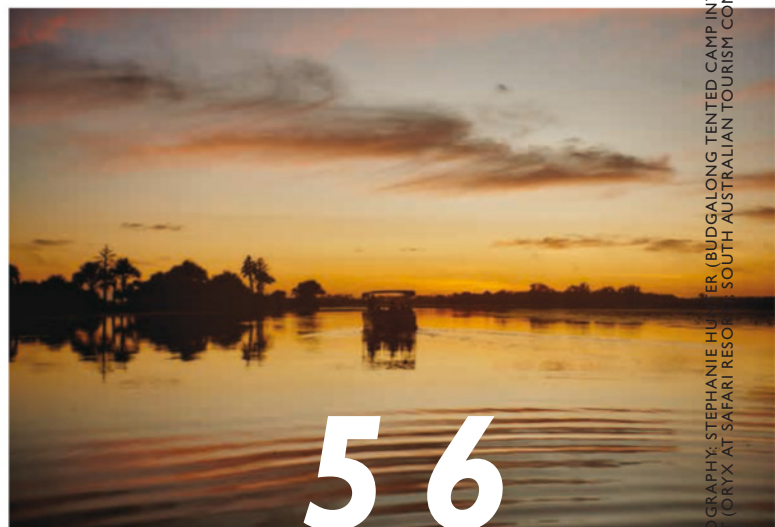
Agritourism is on the rise across Australia as farms and cattle stations diversify their income streams by offering travellers a taste of life on the land. There's nothing like the sense of perspective that comes from staying on an outback station the size of a small European country. And places such as Callubri Station in NSW, Quobba Station in WA and Bullo River Station in the NT (pictured above right) offer very comfortable digs indeed to do just that in. When it comes to experiencing the raw beauty of regional and rural Australia, farm stays such as Budgalong Spicers Creek (top and left) – which offers off-grid safari-style accommodation on a 2800-hectare sheep and cattle farm near Mudgee, NSW – can't be beaten.



54

Do the lap by wing

If you don't have months to devote to trundling around the country, schedule in the highlights on a 16-day private jet tour with Captain's Choice. With wheels down in places such as Exmouth, Coober Pedy, Uluru and Kangaroo Island, you and 34 other guests will travel in absolute comfort and stay in luxury accommodation along the way.



56

5 5

The Larapinta through a First Nations lens

An expedition along the extraordinary Larapinta Trail in Central Australia is somewhat of a pilgrimage for those of us stalking quietude and nature absorption. But to truly connect with Country, take to the trail with a First Nations guide. A new partnership between Indigenous-owned 100% Finke River Culture & Adventure and Intrepid Travel will lead travellers on a trek enabling a richly layered understanding of the landscape and cultural heritage.



Be immersed in Arnhem Land

A journey of truly epic scale and life-affirming immersion, the 13-day Outback Spirit Arnhem Land Wilderness Adventure is one for your archive of remarkable life experiences. The journey begins in Cairns/Gimuy and concludes in Darwin/Garramilla, but what happens in between is an erudition in the world's oldest living culture. You'll spend nights in luxury safari camps and days exploring the Cobourg Peninsula, Mt Borradaile and the sacred Arafura Swamp.





58

Get your safari on

Find magnificent beasts and safari encounters on home soil at Australia's conservation-forward zoos. In South Australia, Monarto Safari Park sprawls over 1500 hectares, making it the largest open-range safari experience outside Africa. With Monarto Safari Resort (pictured) opening its doors, animal lovers can now stay in tantalising proximity to the Wild Africa precinct. Sydney/Warrane's beloved Taronga Zoo also provides quarters close to zoo residents at its luxe Wildlife Retreat. While in Victoria, pair a visit at Werribee Open Range Zoo with a stay at the grand Lancemore Mansion Hotel Werribee Park.



57

Travel to the tip

Scooting through the pointy end of northernmost Queensland and Cape York delivers big frontier energy. If this edge-of-world-type adventure appeals to your wandering heart, you can go about it a few ways. Our recommendation for the more refined adventurer is BFC Air Safaris' nine-night excursion, which covers 4800 kilometres of the region by plane. For those with a body-on-the-line kind of attitude, join Cape York Motorcycle Adventures for a loud and dusty exhilarating escapade on two wheels. Those with cultural curiosity should opt for a 4WD and camping adventure with Jarramali Rock Art Tours (pictured).



59

Relax on the Murray

For those who err on the side of gentle adventure, slipping through one of Australia's most iconic waterways on a luxury houseboat is highly compatible with relaxation. Embark in South Australia's Paringa and be shown the ropes of navigating your floating home before motoring (rather slowly) into the Murray River sunset. With boats that sleep from two to 12 guests, this journey can be a romantic voyage or a water-top celebration as you watch rich-red ridges and bush-hemmed river bends pass by.

EMBRACE THAT SUNDAY FEELING

This NEW, family-friendly Hamilton Island resort embraces *LIFE* in the SLOW lane.

White sand beaches, gentle waves and getting on 'island time' have always made Hamilton Island the first spot that comes to mind when thinking about Queensland's Whitsundays. Always a place to relax and recharge, modern wellness travel here means so much more than a spa treatment or green juice. And now a new kind of tropical island stay has arrived.

The Sundays reimagines laid-back luxury, combining boutique, beachfront accommodation with an encouragement to slow down and appreciate life's simple pleasures, so every day feels like a Sunday.

LAID-BACK LUXURY

The Sundays is nestled into picturesque gardens on the northern end of Catseye Beach. Despite a feeling of being away from it all, the resort is a short walk from Hamilton Island's main resort centre and restaurants, so guests have the best of both worlds.

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: *Enjoy a slow start to your day with fantastic views from your balcony or terrace; Relax with a drink by the pool; The stylish rooms and suites feature soothing tones and natural textures.*

This new boutique stay is all about savouring the now. From complimentary sunrise yoga to moonlight movies for kids and a daily sundae ritual by the beachside pool, it makes a compelling case for doing less, better.

Even the architecture is designed to harmonise with the surrounding tropical landscape. Soft curves are paired with a grounded coastal style that shows off the panoramic Coral Sea views and adds to the hotel's calm aesthetic.

Plus, with direct flights to Hamilton Island from Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane in under two and a half hours, as well as complimentary hotel transfers from the airport or marina, getting here is as easy as the vacation itself.

PICTURE-PERFECT ROOMS

Every small detail has been considered in the creation of the 59 guest rooms and suites, from in-room amenities by LEIF to walls adorned with custom artworks by First Nations/Hungarian artist Tiarna Herczeg. There's even a signature in-room scent by The Raconteur.

Designed by Hamilton Island's own interior designer, Carrie Williams, the result is

relaxed Australian style using natural textures and soft hues to lull guests into a mellow state. This soothing palette runs throughout the resort, from its poolside sun lounges to the shaded cabanas.

Every room and suite has been built with a balcony or terrace, perfectly framing the postcard-perfect views of the surrounding reef and lush greenery.

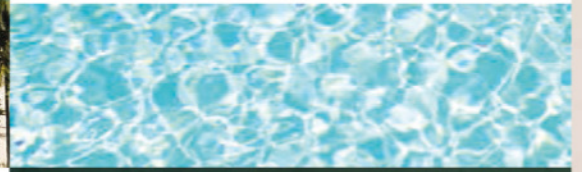
MEMORABLE AMENITIES

Each day has been planned with a relaxed structure, so guests can get involved in as much or as little as they wish.

Greet each day with morning yoga, pilates and island walks. Recharge with daily



In partnership with The Sundays



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Find picturesque Catseye Beach on your doorstep; Catseye Pool Club serves up Aussie meals with a deliciously modern twist; Spend hours poolside while enjoying stunning sea vistas.



(and deliciously complimentary) sundaes by the pool. Wind down with moonlight movies twice a week and take advantage of family-focused features.

Guests have complimentary access to a range of water sports – from stand-up paddleboards to catamarans – so you can get the blood pumping before relaxing by the resort pool.

Or take a few extra steps to set up for a day on the sand without any crowds at the exclusive, guest-only beach. Settle in with an aperitif on the boardwalk for a front-row view of the stunning Catseye Bay.

DELECTABLE DINING

What is rejuvenation if not a hearty choice of fresh, delectable dishes? That's what guests will discover at onsite restaurant, Catseye Pool Club.

The relaxed yet elevated menu was created by acclaimed chefs Josh and Julie Niland, and celebrates the community feeling of mealtimes while championing seasonal Australian produce.

"The vision behind [Catseye Pool Club] reflects so much of what I value – bringing people together to create memories in beautiful surroundings," explains Josh.



Based on elevated versions of classic Australian family dinners, expect refined simplicity. Think roasted Sun Farms Sommerlad chicken with sides like chicken fat roast potatoes, gravy, tomato and grilled bread salad, and barbecued line-caught Bowen coral trout with garlic saltbush and Warrigal greens.

A day spent by the pool can be complemented by a dedicated poolside menu, featuring woodfired *souvas*. Don't want to leave your room? Kick back and soak in the views with tasty treats delivered

straight to your door, whether you're after a full breakfast or late-night snack.

EXPLORING THE ISLAND

While daily life at The Sundays is very much about the art of staying still, guests who seek more can explore the wider island with ease.

Take a day trip to the striking Whitehaven Beach, or see the iconic Heart Reef from above on a helicopter tour. Pop over to Hamilton Island's championship golf course for a hit, or explore over 12 kilometres of the island's stunning nature and wildlife. Later, slow the pace back down with a visit to Spa wumurdaylin for a treatment or two.

Looking for more tasty treats? Visit one of the island's many restaurants – there are more than 20 to choose from.

Visit hamiltonisland.com.au/accommodation/the-sundays



Culture trips

Everything from *OPERA* in the outback to the continuum of *ANCIENT* cultural traditions in the Top End takes CENTRE stage as in-depth ways to *APPRECIATE* a destination.

60

Camp with Custodians

Western Australia's Camping with Custodians is a first for Australia. The program invites travellers to stay at one of the state's Aboriginal-owned and operated campgrounds such as Lombadina on the Dampier Peninsula, Imintji on the Gibb River Road (pictured top) and Peedamulla in the Pilbara (pictured main), to meet the Traditional Custodians and learn about their culture and land. Fees paid support employment, training and generating income, creating a positive impact for both camper and community.

61

Australia's most important cultural gatherings

Garma is a four-day event hosted by the Yothu Yindi Foundation to share traditional Yolŋu knowledge systems and address and improve social equity for Aboriginal people. The annual festival (pictured above) in north-east Arnhem Land is the country's largest Indigenous gathering showcasing art, song, dance, film and storytelling. Garma attracts thousands of political and business leaders from across the globe who are invited to the remote Gulkula ceremonial site, about 40 kilometres from Nhulunbuy on the Gove Peninsula. Garma celebrates its 25th anniversary 1–4 August this year. See also Cape York's Laura Quinkan Dance Festival (slated next for June 2026) and the Katherine region's Barunga Festival (6–9 June; left) for more culturally significant First Nations gatherings.



63

See K'gari in a new light

The sky is a liquid violet as luminous lilies bobbing on the silvery surface of Lake McKenzie/Boorangoora help to illustrate its magnificence. *Illumina* by Canadian-born artist Bruce Ramus uses lighting, lasers and audio-visual projections to incorporate and celebrate the natural environment on Queensland's K'gari. The light and sound show, *Return to Sky*, invites guests of Kingfisher Bay Resort to immerse themselves in the island's landscapes.



62

Sing for the outback

Opera Queensland has impressed its image into the red dirt of the outback. The Festival of Outback Opera, which runs this year between 13–19 May, is about singing and scenery on a grand scale: gather under the stars at Australian Age of Dinosaurs in Winton for *Dark Sky Serenade*. Or linger in Longreach to see singers like Kate Miller-Heidke (pictured below) or soprano Sumi Jo lead *Singing in the Night* at Camden Park Station. Up the ante on the experience further with a stay at Ranglands Outback Camp.



WORDS: MEGAN ARKINSTALL (GARMA); CARLA GROSSETTI (REMAINING); PHOTOGRAPHY: GLENN HUNT (FESTIVAL OF OUTBACK OPERA); LEICOLHN MCKEL
LAR (GARMA); TOURISM NI/ALANA HOLMBERG (DANCERS AT BARUNGA FESTIVAL); TOURISM AND EVENTS QUEENSLAND/AYEISHA SHELDON (LAKE MCKENZIE)
BOORANGOORA, K'GARI); TOURISM AND EVENTS QUEENSLAND (ILLUMINA LIGHT SHOW, K'GARI)

64

*A cool change in Townsville*

The temperature in Townsville isn't the only thing that's hot – the North Queensland capital of cool will have you wiping your brow thanks to its diverse culinary scene, incredible outdoor offerings and luxurious five-star waterfront hotel, Ardo. But the city's relatively under-the-radar arts community and communal creative spaces are also raising the mercury. Whether it's a world-class exhibition of Wedgwood ceramics at Perc Tucker Regional Art Gallery (until 24 August), a showcase of local work at Umbrella Studio Contemporary Arts or a hands-on pottery workshop at the North QLD Potters Association, Townsville's creativity flows as freely as a sea breeze in summer.



65

Festival season in Adelaide

March is arguably the most exciting month on Adelaide/Tarntanya's calendar, with three huge events – Adelaide Fringe, WOMADelaide (pictured) and Adelaide Festival – creating an absolute buzz on the streets. Some locals call it 'Mad March', when some 6000-plus artists descend on the city, from comedians and musicians to street performers. No matter which day you visit, or which way you look, you're sure to find music, arts and entertainment. Or set your sights on Illuminate Adelaide (5–21 July), a winter festival of art, light, music and tech.



66

A bucket-list bush bash

The tiny outback town of Birdsville in south-west Queensland has become renowned for its historic pub and annual Birdsville Races. But each year, the numbers in the town also swell for the annual Big Red Bash, an all-ages music festival held in the Simpson Desert. The epic event is on pause for 2025 but is expected to come back bigger and better in 2026. Festival-goers camp under the starry sky and enjoy performances by Aussie music legends. If you can't wait until 2026, fill your cup at the Broken Hill Mundi Mundi Bash (21–23 August) in outback NSW, at which Missy Higgins, Hoodoo Gurus, Birds of Tokyo and The Cat Empire will perform.

67

An arts buzz in Bendigo

A \$54-million expansion of Bendigo Art Gallery is set to lure even more art lovers to the regional Victorian city which has built its brand around arts, culture and events. Bendigo's place in Australia's art scene has also been bolstered by the exclusive exhibition *Frida Kablo: In her own image* (until 13 July). Fans of the revolutionary Mexican artist are making a beeline for Bendigo to see the pop-up exhibition featuring some of the artist's most treasured belongings.



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LIGHTHOUSE THEATRE



SOLSTICE EVENT



YOGA FESTIVAL



FIRE NIGHT



LIVE MUSIC

EMBRACE THE WINTER

CHECK OUT WHAT'S ON IN
WARRNAMBOOL FOR MORE IDEAS...



VISIT



WHAT'S ON

68

Do a hot spring hop in outback Queensland

Forget embarking on an outback pub crawl. Instead, enjoy pool-hopping around the outback on the Wellness Way. The new trail connects 24 towns that sit above the Great Artesian Basin across Queensland's rugged interior. From Mitchell and Cunnamulla (pictured) to Longreach and Mount Isa, each of the towns is home to pools, springs and bathhouses filled with mineral-rich waters said to contain healing powers that promote skin health, soothe muscles and instil tranquillity.



OUTBACK *odysseys*

Beyond the red DIRT roads and tiny towns, the *OUTBACK* is full of extraordinary beauty, from *HOT POOLS* to waterfalls and *ANCIENT* rock formations. Venture out there to see this *WONDROUS* place for yourself.



WORDS: IMOGEN EVESON (THE GHAN); MEGAN ARKINSTALL (REMAINING). PHOTOGRAPHY: TOURISM AND EVENTS QUEENSLAND/PHIL WARRING (TALAROO HOT SPRINGS); TOURISM AND EVENTS QUEENSLAND/JACK HARLEM/FIRME AGENCY (CHARLOTTE PLAINS BATHS); DOUG FAIRCLOTH (HOTEL CUNNAMULLA BATHHOUSE); ADAM EDWARDS (ROCK WALLABY, EMUS); GETTY IMAGES/ZETTER (FLINDERS RANGES); HEATHER DINAS PHOTOGRAPHY (THE GHAN CABIN)



See Ikara from land and sky

It's no wonder Ikara-Flinders Ranges was nominated for a tentative listing as a World Heritage site with UNESCO. The rugged ranges, some 500 kilometres north of Adelaide/Tarntanya, were formed more than 600 million years ago and are home to wonders such as the colossal amphitheatre Wilpena Pound. Hike its ancient ridges on the three-day Arkaba Walk, see it from above on a scenic flight from Rawnsley Park Station, or stay at Arkaroola International Dark Sky Sanctuary for a cosmos show like no other. Alternatively, take a seven-day Lake Eyre and Flinders Ranges tour with APT, as Australia's largest salt lake, Kati-Thanda Lake Eyre, experiences a spectacular and rare flooding phenomenon.



70

Journey of a lifetime aboard The Ghan

Every Australian dreams of travelling on *The Ghan* at least once. This legendary train journey, named for the pioneering cameleons who blazed a path into the Red Centre, captures imaginations as it makes tracks across the country between Adelaide/Tarntanya and Darwin/Garramilla. Book a Gold Premium cabin for a 21st-century translation of the train's original Art Deco stylings and a colour palette drawn from Albert Namatjira's famous landscapes. Or level up in Platinum (pictured right). Then sit back and watch the living painting unfold through your window.





71

Discover the wild wonders of the Kimberley

The far reaches of Western Australia could be the country's most wild. Where the striking red of pindan cliffs meets white sands and turquoise waters. A cradle for ancient rock art, thunderous waterfalls and dramatic gorges. Travelling slowly through the Kimberley is ideal. Consider Intrepid Travel's Wild Kimberley Overland, which unfolds over 11 days. For those shorter on time, its Broome/Rubibi to the Bungle Bungles tour can have you seeing it all in just five days. You'll explore the state's largest cave system, visit old gold rush towns, see Cathedral and Windjana gorges, and the bizarre and beautiful 20-million-year-old forms of the Bungle Bungle Range in Purnululu National Park.

72

See Uluru at every hour

Enigmatic Uluru changes colours throughout the day, starting at sunrise when the monolith is bathed in a flaming red glow. Take it in on a Sunrise Journey tour, operated by Ayers Rock Resort, when artworks created by three local Anangu women come to life through laser projection and music. Mid-morning, join a free ranger-guided Mala walk around the base of the ochre-hued rock to learn the Ancestral Anangu Mala story. Then watch Uluru blush pink and purple at sunset and dine on bush tucker under the stars as the *Field of Light* installation begins to twinkle.



WORDS: MEGAN ARKINSTALL; PHOTOGRAPHY: TOURISM NT/KATE FLOWERS (ULURU); MAGDALENA ALEKSANDROWICZ (KIMBERLEY WILD BUS); TOURISM AUSTRALIA (PURNULULU NATIONAL PARK AND PENDER BAY); DAPIER PENINSULA; DESTINATION NSW/DEE KRAMER (MOON RISING OVER MUNGO NATIONAL PARK); DESTINATION NSW/FIN MATSON (AERIAL OF MUNGO NATIONAL PARK); TOURISM AUSTRALIA/SOUTH AUSTRALIA TOURISM COMMISSION (CAMEL TREKING); TOURISM NT/HELLO EMILY (JIM JIM FALLS)



73

Ancient discoveries in Mungo National Park

The lunar-like landscape of Mungo National Park in outback NSW was formed by ancient dry lake basins and shifting sands. It's a mind-boggling land rich in Indigenous history and home to the world's oldest human cremations and megafauna remains, where emus and giant red kangaroos roam. Australian Wildlife Journeys leads a six-day small group tour to Mungo and beyond that gives travellers the chance to appreciate its enormous significance to human history and ecology.



74

Cross deserts by camelback

Trekking across a vast and empty desert may be unthinkable to some. To others, it's the ultimate adventure or even a journey of self-discovery. Channel Robyn Davidson, who trekked for 2700 kilometres across WA's deserts in the 1970s, with a little help from Outback Camel Company, which operates week-long desert treks and expeditions across the Simpson Desert. Alternatively, Camel Treks Australia (pictured) ventures through the Ikara-Flinders Ranges and deep into the Tirari Desert.



75

A collision of nature and history in Kakadu

Sprawling across 20,000 square kilometres, World Heritage-listed Kakadu is a kaleidoscope of savannah woodlands, rugged stone escarpments, tropical waterholes, cascading waterfalls and wetlands that swell in the wet season. It's a habitat to one-third of the country's bird species and some 10,000 crocs, with Yellow Water Billabong a haven for wildlife spotting. And its Traditional Owners, the Bininj/Mungguy people, have lived here for 65,000 years, with some 5000 rock art sites – including famous Ubirr and Burrungkuy (Nourlangie) – dotted throughout the national park. To see a place of such staggering biodiversity and history is a must for all Australians.



find your

Outback Spirit

The Kimberley

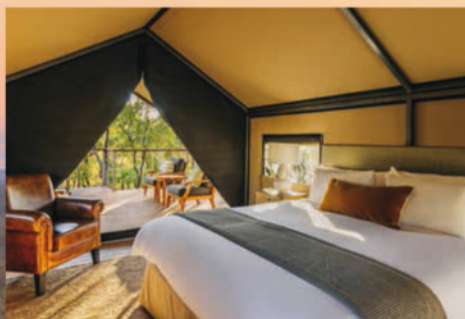
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*Terms & Conditions apply. Advertised prices are per person, twin share, based on the Earlybird Fare departing 1 September 2026 (Exquisite Kimberley Adventure). Advertised savings are per couple based on twin share. Savings are based on the price difference between the Everyday Fare and Earlybird Fare and are reflected in the tour fare quoted, subject to availability. Bookings must be made by 30 September 2025, unless allocation sold out prior. Offer is available for new bookings only, for travel in 2026. For full terms and conditions, please visit outbackspirittours.com.au. Prices correct at 15 April 2025.



P a t h s l e s s

Whether *HIKING* off-piste in a ski region out of season or venturing to *FAR*-flung islands, travelling off the beaten *TRACK* can reveal the very best of our country.

t r a v e l l e d





76



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: In summer, the Snowy Mountains comes alive with alpine wildflowers; The Snowies Alpine Walk ambles along the river; Romantic dwellings around Kosciuszko National Park; The bike guides walkers through a forest of snow gums. OPPOSITE (from left): Enjoy dinners catered by Birchwood Cafe at Big Yard Farm; The view from Numbananga Lodge.

Beneath the snow

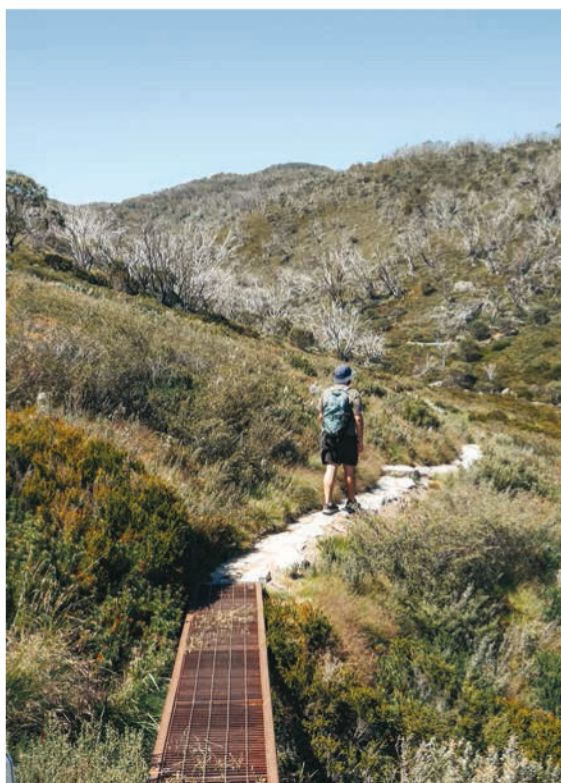
A new hike in NSW's Snowy Mountains showcases the region's unyielding magnificence as a destination for all seasons, Elizabeth Whitehead discovers.

I'M LYING ON THE Thredbo riverbed, looking upwards through the glassy, rippling sheet of the current. From a pebble's perspective, I watch as blurry shards of sunlight splinter across my field of vision. The water flowing around me is silky and tea-coloured, as if it's been steeped deep within the mountains before journeying here.

Suddenly, I'm heaved from the river by my partner, spluttering as he laughs. I had it coming – it was my fault for saying that this river feels like an archetypal place for a baptism. But it's true: there's something deeply sublime about the Snowy Mountains. Especially right here, at this gentle crook in the river, where the undulating Snowies Alpine Walk has emerged from a snow gum forest to trace along the water's edge. The river's cold has left goosebumps on my skin like tiny toothmarks; an icy bite that invigorates me to my core.

The Snowies Alpine Walk, which opened in December 2024, is a major hike that combines new and pre-existing trails to create a spectacular four-day, 56-kilometre loop around the alpine roof of Australia. Starting at the ski village of Guthega, the trail ambles along the fabled Snowy River before ascending Mt Kosciuszko, dipping down into Perisher and then plunging into the Thredbo Valley.

Most of these places are well-known, yet inextricably associated with winter sports, calling to mind images of packed resorts and slopes dotted with Gore-Tex-clad skiers. But when the sun burns away the veil of snow, a mystic landscape is revealed beneath. It's one full of incredible dynamism and texture: hillsides soft with tussocks of meadowgrass, yawning glacial valleys stretched between rugged mountain spines, and forests of skeletal snow gums, ghostly white and haunting as their pale skins glint in the alpine sun. →





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Big Yard Farm on the border of Kosciuszko National Park is the perfect place to unplug; Exploring the 100-acre property; Fluffy willy wagtail chicks also call the property home; A heritage hut on the Snowies Alpine Walk.

These are the very same high country scenes immortalised by bush poet Banjo Paterson in his 1890 poem *The Man from Snowy River*, which has stirred the imaginations of readers for generations. Now, the Snowies Alpine Walk gives visitors a reason to linger here 'out of season' and immerse themselves in the same mountainscapes that inspired Paterson, uncovering the natural splendour hidden beneath the snow.

When my partner and I walk the trail in the height of summer, the mountains are bright with alpine wildflowers in a triptych of yellow, white and pink. There are meadows flecked with cheery, sunshine-hued billy buttons, crisp snow daisies and vivid pink trigger plants. We pass wooden heritage huts that evoke fleeting dreams of running away to the mountains forever, and cross dramatic suspension bridges that sway over alpine creeks. When the trail happens upon a quiet bank of the river, the water beckons. We wade in, cooling off and fluttering our legs in the gentle current like a pair of idling trout.

We bookend the hike with a luxury stay at Big Yard Farm, a 100-acre property adjoining Kosciuszko National Park. Here, we swap our hiking boots for day beds, and let nature come to us instead. A family of fallow deer bound across the property. Kangaroos and wallabies amble along the fence line, grazing. And, in the morning, I awake to the peep of willy wagtail chicks bunched in a nest outside the bedroom window – three tiny faces blinking at the world as their mother flits about the garden, foraging breakfast. The only creature that seems to elude us is the river trout, slipping past our lines as we wait on the shady bank. No matter: a catered dinner is sorted courtesy of Birchwood Cafe – freshly shucked Merimbula oysters, lobster risotto and lavender parfait. As I lay it out in the garden, the evening sun honeys the landscape gold, and I feel just as I did emerging from the river: renewed, refreshed, rewinded. **AT**

A traveller's checklist

Getting there

The SNOWIES ALPINE WALK is in the Thredbo-Perisher area of Kosciuszko National Park. It's a 5.5 hour drive from Sydney/Warrane and three hours from Canberra.

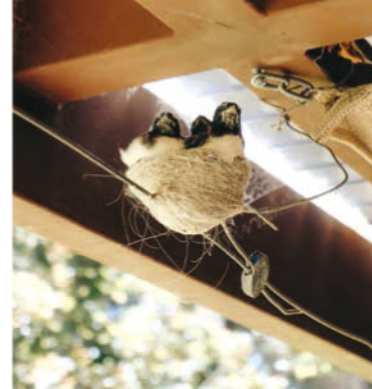
Playing there

The Snowies Alpine Walk can either be undertaken as a continuous 56-kilometre-long four-day hike or as a series of day hikes. If you're walking the trail continuously, you can stay along the way at various accommodation options in Guthega, Charlotte Pass and Perisher Valley. nationalparks.nsw.gov.au

If you are doing one or more sections as day hikes, local transfer companies such as SNOW CONNECT can collect and return you to your accommodation or vehicle. snowconnect.com.au

Staying there

NUMBANANGA LODGE in Smiggin Holes is a luxurious ski lodge owned by NSW National Parks and Wildlife that makes for a comfortable and central base.



Bookend your journey with a stay at **BIG YARD FARM**, 25 minutes from Jindabyne, for your own patch of Snowy Mountains pasture and alpine bushland. bigyardfarm.com.au

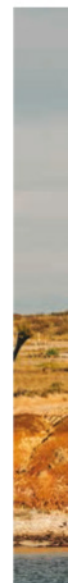
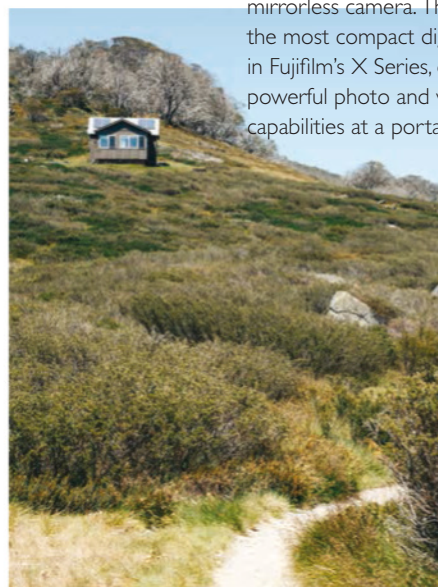
Eating there

It's important to note most restaurants close outside of the winter season. The closest town for supplies is Jindabyne. **BIRCHWOOD CAFE** in Jindabyne offers convenient and delicious packed lunches for hikers, as well as elevated breakfast and dinner catering that can be picked up. birchwoodjindabyne.au

THE DALGETY BREWING COMPANY, a 40-minute drive from Jindabyne, is a rural microbrewery with rugged landscape views and excellent food and beverage options.

Gear to pack

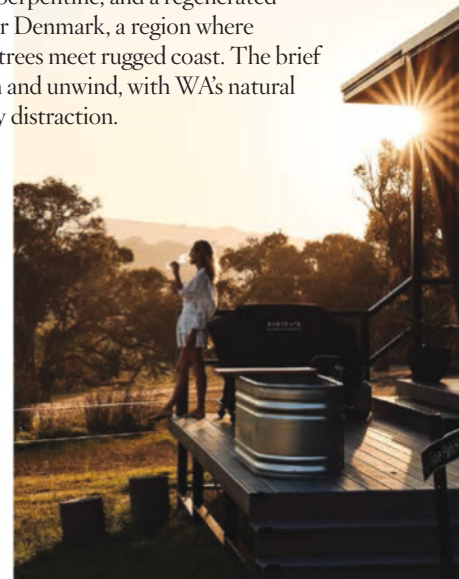
Photographs in this story were taken by the writer Elizabeth Whitehead on a **FUJIFILM X-M5** mirrorless camera. The X-5 is the most compact digital camera in Fujifilm's X Series, offering powerful photo and video capabilities at a portable size.



77

Unwind in a tiny cabin in WA wilderness

There's something intoxicating about being holed up in a tiny cabin nestled in the wilderness. Heyscape has 25 cosy but premium off-grid cabins across Western Australia with locations that include: a winery in the coastal region of Yallingup; a property where horses and sheep freely roam in Serpentine; and a regenerated cattle farm near Denmark, a region where towering karri trees meet rugged coast. The brief is to slow down and unwind, with WA's natural beauty the only distraction.



78

Remote Eyre Peninsula luxury

A once untamed 19th-century sheep station has been rewilded to become South Australia's first-ever private island accommodation, set off the coast of the Eyre Peninsula. Rumi on Louth features king rooms, one-bedroom suites and a private retreat that sleeps 10, all with views of the vast ocean beyond. Experiences include kayak fishing, beach picnics, e-bike hire and stargazing. Hire the entire island for exclusive use for up to 22 of your equally intrepid mates. Currently in phase one of opening, named Rumi Reveal, phase two is set to be unveiled late 2025 and will see the addition of 26 earth-sheltered villas complete with organic gardens, chicken coops and a wellness spa with onsen-style hot baths – all operating entirely off-grid and expanding upon the island's existing sustainable ethos. For more off-grid escapes on the Eyre Peninsula, see family-run business EYRE.WAY, which has just launched Bandari (pictured below), its third luxe tiny home in the region.



79

Trek Cradle Mountain

The Overland Track is known the world over for being a spectacular but challenging alpine walk in Tasmania/Lutruwita's remote wilderness. Tasmanian Walking Co. operates a seven-day Cradle Mountain Signature Walk through the World Heritage-listed area to Lake St Clair, Australia's deepest natural lake. The 65-kilometre-long trail takes in craggy summits, temperate rainforest, waterfalls and glacially carved lakes. Retreat to private huts each evening to indulge in gourmet meals and local wines, recharging for the next day's adventure.



80

Get away to the Capertee Valley

Sunvale is a remote bush escape that blends glamping with luxurious lodge amenities to deliver the ideal group getaway accommodation. The four-bedroom eco lodge is part of Turon Gates Mountain Retreat, a 2428-hectare property that offers camping, glamping and cottage stays in NSW's Capertee Valley. Rooms branch out from the communal living area with a long galley kitchen and 10-seater table at its heart. A striking glass fireplace is positioned in front of bifold doors that open onto the multi-level deck to reveal stunning mountain views – best observed from the woodfired hot tub with a glass of wine in hand as the sun sets.



WORDS: KATIE CARLIN (SUNVALE); TAYLOR DARNELL (NORTH-WEST TASMANIA); MEGAN ARKINSTALL (REMAINING); PHOTOGRAPHY: GM PHOTOGRAPHICS (SUNVALE); TOURISM AUSTRALIA/SHAUNA MCNAUGHT (TIVOLI ISLAND RETREAT); TOURISM TASMANIA (CRADLE MOUNTAIN); TOURISM AUSTRALIA (WOMBAT); MATTEA CARSON (THE NUT)



81

Venture to the Tiwi Islands

A visit to 'The Island of Smiles', 80 kilometres north of Darwin/Garramilla, offers insights into the proud Tiwi people who make up 90 per cent of the population and have a distinct language and culture. The islands have long attracted fishermen (for barramundi) and art collectors (there are five Tiwi-owned art centres). Travel by ferry or small plane for a day trip, or stay to watch the sunset from Tiwi Island Retreat, which has luxury tents and rooms with ocean views.



82

Feel solitude in north-west Tassie

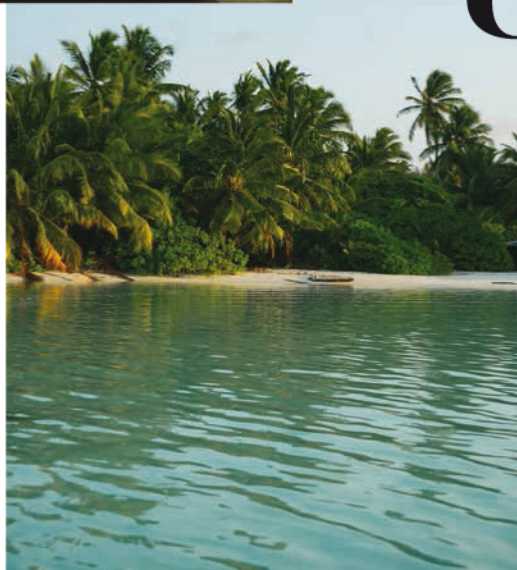
There's no place quite like Gardiner Point to make you feel like you're the last person on Earth. Known as the Edge of the World, this windswept lookout in Tasmania/Lutruwita's wild north-west marks the tip of the Tarkine/Takayna – a region that embodies natural beauty as much as it does complete isolation. Join a guided tour with Tall Timbers to explore its craggy coastline, ancient rainforests and buttongrass plains, all backdropped by the bitter-cold Bass Strait. Bookend your trip with a stay in Stanley. The tiny fishing village is full of surprises, like an ancient volcanic plug known as The Nut/Munatrick and Hursey Seafoods, winner of the 2024 National Seafood Industry Restaurant Award.



83

Go remote island-hopping in WA

Rugged Christmas Island is often referred to as 'the Galápagos of the Indian Ocean'. Lying 1500 kilometres off the coast of Western Australia, the island is best known for its annual red crab migration. But it is also on the radar for nature-lovers drawn to its rich biodiversity, tropical rainforests, protected wetlands and diverse wildlife. A short flight away, the Cocos Keeling Islands (pictured) are made up of 27 atolls with white-sand beaches fringed by palm trees, and coral reefs teeming with marine life. Visit the far-flung islands for an adventurous tropical escape that you won't need to share with the masses. See also adventure tours and fishing charters in the Mackerel Islands, off the coast of the Pilbara, and Abrolhos Islands, 60 kilometres west of Geraldton.





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the Coffs Coast



BOAMBEE CREEK, SAWTELL

Fly from **Sydney**, multiple times daily.
Fly from **Melbourne**, currently 5 flights a week.
Schedule subject to change.





84

A triptych of luxury lodges

Turquoise, terracotta and emerald are the three bands of colour that define the distinct landscapes that backdrop the three Luxury Lodges of Australia in Tropical North Queensland. Stitch them together and it becomes a bold needlework. Bounce from Lizard Island, with its white sand hemmed in by turquoise seas, to Silky Oaks Lodge, which is enveloped in the tropical greenery of the Daintree, to Mt Mulligan Lodge in the outback, which is dominated by the russet-red hues of the ancient monolith.



YOU ONLY

From ultimate *ESCAPES* in tropical paradises and luxury *EXPEDITION* cruises to helicopter wine *ODYSSEYS* and decadent dinners, these *OTT* adventures by *LAND*, sea and air need to be on your *WISH* list.

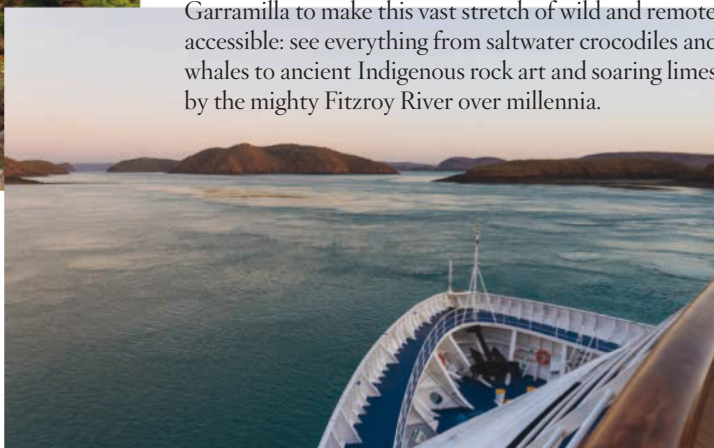
live once



85

Cruise the Kimberley

A cruise to the Kimberley is on most Australians' bucket lists for a multitude of reasons. True North (pictured left) has small ships purpose-built for navigating the region's shallow bays and river systems, offering unparalleled access to that Kimberley magic. Or join a Silversea cruise onboard *Silver Cloud* (below) from Broome/Rubibi or Darwin/Garramilla to make this vast stretch of wild and remote coastline more accessible: see everything from saltwater crocodiles and humpback whales to ancient Indigenous rock art and soaring limestone cliffs carved by the mighty Fitzroy River over millennia.



WORDS: KASSIA BYRNES (ASCEND); CARLA GROSSETTI (REMAINING); PHOTOGRAPHY: ELISE HASSEY (LIZARD ISLAND); TRUE NORTH (THE KIMBERLEY); KRIS MARKOVSKA (TALBOT BAY AT SUNRISE WITH SILVER CLOUD); GETTY IMAGES/PHILIP THURSTON (GREAT AUSTRALIAN BIGHT); MYEONGHO SEO/SHUTTER-STOCK (ADELIE PENGUINS IN CAPE ADARE, ANTARCTICA)

86

An Aussie rite of passage

It's time to leave your life as a corporate schlub behind and head out on the road to do the Big Lap of Australia. While you might have pressed pause on this popular pilgrimage while working your way up the career ladder, the bitumen still beckons for a golden gap year. Cash in your long service leave and hit the road in your RV to make your own discoveries during this indulgent oh-so-Aussie rite of passage.



Sail to Antarctica from Australia 87

While most Antarctic expedition cruises depart from Ushuaia in Argentina, the southernmost city on Earth, it's possible to sail from Australian shores, too. Hobart/Nipaluna is a launch pad for exploring remote East Antarctica with Scenic Cruises. Departing January 2026, its 24-day itinerary Antarctica's Ross Sea: Majestic Ice & Wildlife (pictured) cruises from the Tassie capital to New Zealand onboard *Scenic Eclipse II*. Aurora Expeditions' 24-day Mawson's Antarctica sets sail in December onboard *Douglas Mawson*, stopping at Tasmania/Lutruwita's subantarctic Macquarie Island and crossing the Arctic Circle. Or flip the script with the 31-day half-circumnavigation of the Antarctic onboard Ponant's *Le Commandant Charcot*, sailing January 2026 from Ushuaia all the way back home to Hobart.



88

The ultimate wine odyssey by air

You've probably visited several wineries, possibly even in South Australia, but you've never been on a wine trip like this. Watch the ground below give way as the roar of propellers signals the start of a heli-tour between three wine regions and three female-owned and/or operated wineries on an Ascend Wine Odyssey: Oliver's Taranga in McLaren Vale, Golding Wines in the Adelaide Hills and Kimbolton Wines in Langhorne Creek. At each stop there's a different experience – from a tasting amid the vines to a long lunch to cheese pairings. Plus, there's a chance to compare how the different geography of each region gives a unique flavour to its wines. This is wine tasting at its most luxurious.



89

The most decadent of dinners

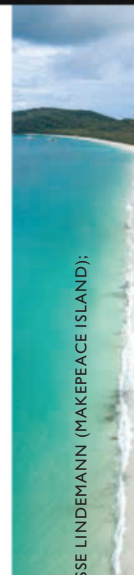
Accept your rich benefactor's offer to drop \$50K on Dinner with David Walsh, founder of Mona in Hobart/Nipaluna. The experience, dreamt up by Cultural Attractions of Australia, includes a private jet from the mainland, a two-night stay in Mona's luxury pavilions and lavish degustation dinner with David at onsite eatery, The Source. The price tag includes a private museum and winery tour, lunch at Faro Bar + Restaurant and access to art experiences.



90

Circumnavigate Australia

Circumnavigation cruises around Australia operate between September and April each year. Think of the voyages as a highlights reel of the country as the ships hug the curves of the coastline. Itineraries tend to include capital cities from Sydney/Warrane to Brisbane/Meenjin and Perth/Boorloo to Melbourne/Naarm, as well as regional ports like Hobart/Nipaluna, Port Lincoln and Cairns/Gimuy. You'll need some time on your hands to circle our vast coastline with Princess Cruises, Viking, Holland American Line and Silversea (pictured).



91

Hire Richard Branson's Aussie bome

Live out your most debauched *White Lotus* fantasies when you book a stay at Richard Branson's Makepeace Island home on the Noosa River. The private sanctuary, surrounded by a tangle of tropical gardens, sleeps up to 22 guests and includes a tennis court, gym, media room, pool and 15-person heated spa, as well as dedicated staff. Inclusions range from guided nature walks to river fishing, kayaking, kids' cooking classes and a sunset river cruise.



In partnership with Rangelands Outback Camp



STYLE AND LUXURY IN THE OUTBACK

ADVENTURE and refined *LUXURY* combine
at the *EXCLUSIVE* Rangelands Outback Camp.



Iconic Australian red dirt, ancient rocky landscapes and shocks of greenery and wildflowers all make the small town of Winton and its surrounds a sight to behold.

Escape the ordinary and unwind in the Queensland outback, where ancient landscapes and off-grid luxury come together at **RANGELANDS OUTBACK CAMP**.

GETTING OFF-GRID

Unforgettable 360-degree views await at Rangelands; bathed in style, your tented camp seamlessly blends into its outback setting. Indulge with carefully curated menus, personalised service and supersized luxury tents that guarantee a private experience. This exclusive camp caters to a maximum of 12 guests at a time.

Located on a private cattle station just 20 minutes from Winton, guests are transferred from Winton or Longreach by a dedicated Rangelands driver.

OUTBACK WONDERS

Join small-group tours and enjoy exclusive access to the ancient Rangelands Rifts with your experienced Savannah guide.

Get sunset bird's-eye views over dramatic mesa country in a helicopter, and explore the rugged land on four wheels through



Bladensburg National Park, visiting Gondwana Stars Observatory and more.

This is also where you'll find the world's only evidence of a dinosaur stampede, and the ancient footprints are still on display at **LARK QUARRY CONSERVATION PARK**. Also visit the **AUSTRALIAN AGE OF DINOSAURS**.

SLEEPING IN LUXURY

After exploring, return to camp, where open rainwater showers and uninterrupted views from private decks await in each tranquil tent.

Luxuriate with comfortable amenities, such as air conditioning, king-sized beds and stylish designer touches.

DELECTABLE DINING

When the sun starts to dip below the horizon, gather for drinks and canapés on

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Take in uninterrupted outback views; Explore the Rangeland Rifts; The Mahal dining tent by night; Spacious tents are filled with luxurious amenities; Relax on the Sunset Deck.

the expansive Sunset Deck, watching as the surrounding landscape is drenched in pinks and oranges.

Later, head to The Mahal lounge and dining tent to savour a gourmet meal made fresh by Rangeland's onsite chef. The meals use local produce to elevate classic outback dishes, and dietary requirements are accommodated.

Guests also enjoy an open bar filled with an expansive hand-selected list of wines and premium beers, with wine pairings offered by the hosts come dinnertime.

Learn more at rangelandscamp.com



Follow Queensland's Pacific Coast Way

You'll need at least a week – if not more – to make the most of this epic 1800-kilometre journey from the Gold Coast's Yugambeh Country to Cairns/Gimuy. Drive from the buzzy beachside hub of Surfers Paradise to the arts and culture capital of Brisbane/Meanjin and onto Sunshine Coast gems such as Noosa, where golden beaches and coveted surf breaks await. Stop at whale-watching hotspot Hervey Bay, historic cities like Bundaberg, then drive along the stunning Whitsunday Coast to Cairns. It's a journey across Queensland's cities, country and coast, topping it off where the Great Barrier Reef meets the Wet Tropics.



Admire silo art in rural Victoria

The Silo Art Movement, which began in 2015, captures the unwavering spirit of regional Australia. The cultural and artistic phenomenon now includes more than 50 artworks across the country, 23 of which are located within Victoria – across the Grampians/Gariwerd, Murray, High Country and Goldfields regions. Renowned street artists have transformed wheat silos into captivating murals, from a Second World War tribute in Walpeup to portraits of Indigenous Elders in Sheep Hills and a homage to Clydesdale horses in Goorambat. Add them to your itinerary on your next regional road trip.

On the

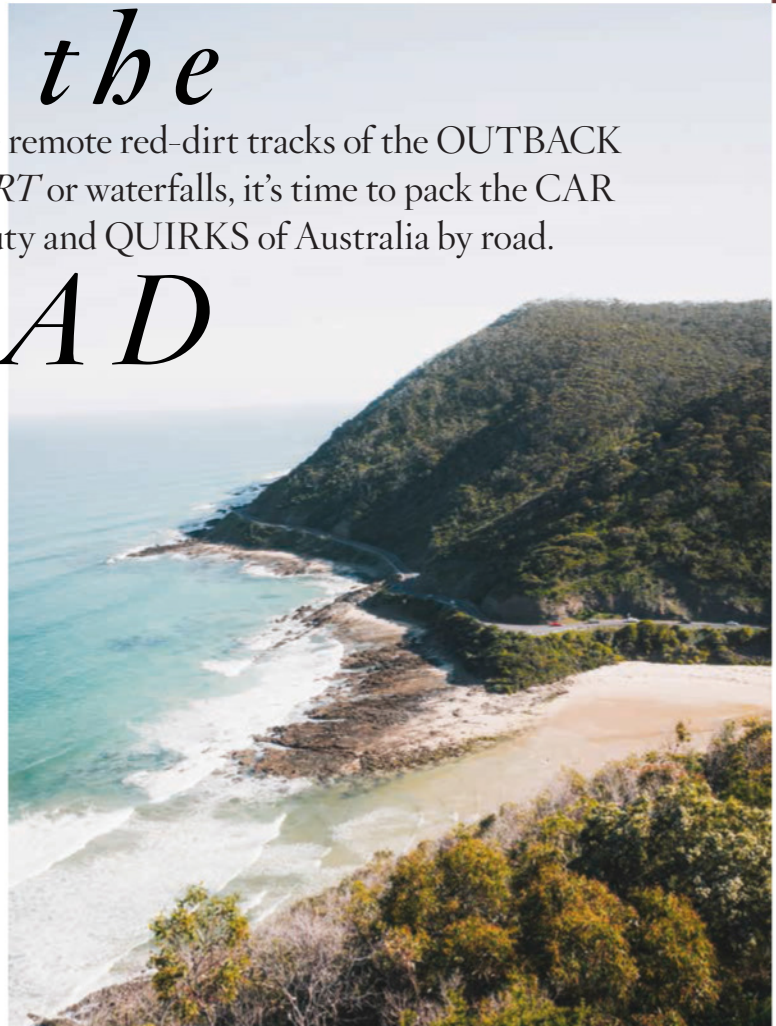
From scenic-rich *COASTAL* routes to the remote red-dirt tracks of the *OUTBACK* and *GENTLE* country drives past *ART* or waterfalls, it's time to pack the *CAR* and mark the *MAP* to see all the beauty and *QUIRKS* of Australia by road.

ROAD

94

Tick off the iconic Great Ocean Road

This coastal drive is an Australian rite of passage, winding 243 kilometres along Victoria's coast. Take in rainforest, clifftops and natural wonders that have been carved out by the wild Southern Ocean – including the Twelve Apostles, Lord Ard Gorge, the Island Archway and the Gibson Steps. If you're only driving in one direction, start your journey in Torquay, so you're on the ocean side of the road, making it easier to steer towards scenic lookouts. Make sure you carve out time to explore vibrant Warrnambool at the Great Ocean Road's western end, too.



WORDS: RACHAEL THOMPSON (GRAND PACIFIC DRIVE); MEGAN ARKINSTALL (REMAINING); PHOTOGRAPHY: DESTINATION NSW/TIM CLARK (SCENIC COASTAL VIEWS FROM INNATURALIA); UNSPAPAT WHELEN (GREAT OCEAN ROAD); TOURISM NT/TOURISM AUSTRALIA (KINGS CANYON); TOURISM AND EVENTS QUEENSLAND/JACK HARLEM (WALLABIES AT CAPE HILLSBOROUGH); ANNE MORELY (SILO ART TRAIL); TOURISM WESTERN AUSTRALIA/SCOTT SLAWINSKI (EAGLE BAY BEACH); DESTINATION NSW/DANIEL TRAN (SEA CLIFF BRIDGE)

95

Hit the road in the Red Centre

Uluru captures the attention of most travellers to the Red Centre, and rightly so. But you can see this iconic monolith and more on a five-day 4WD loop along the Red Centre Way from Alice Springs/Mparntwe. Drive to West MacDonnell National Park to see its landscape of chasms, gorges and waterholes; walk the rim of the 100-metre-high red sandstone Kings Canyon/Watarrka; and, of course, spend time at inimitable Uluru and neighbouring Kata Tjuta before returning to where you began. Discovery Resorts – Kings Canyon, Discovery Parks – Alice Springs and Ayers Rock Resort all make for comfortable crash pads along the way.



97

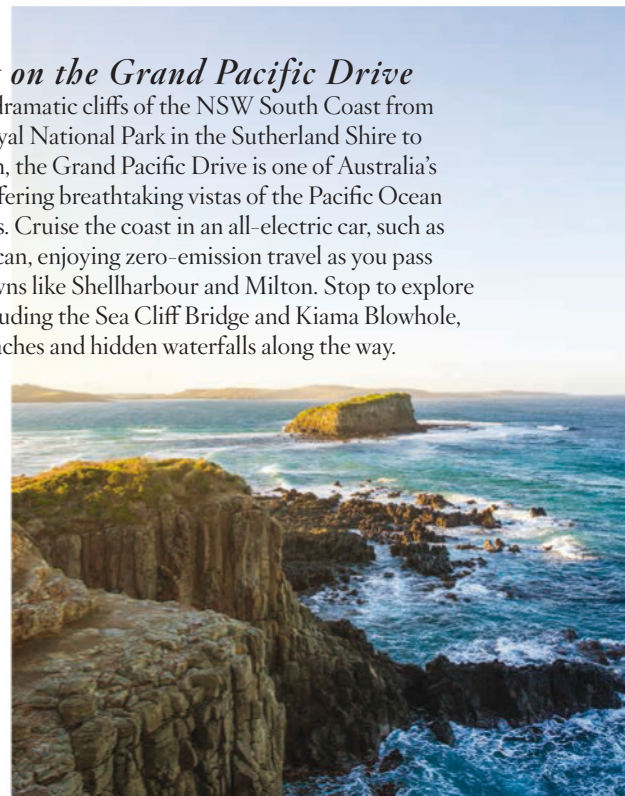
Explore WA's new EV network

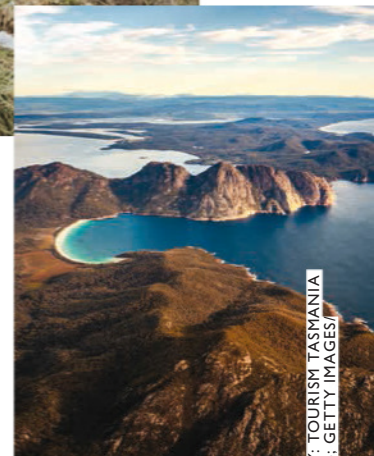
Western Australia is now home to one of the world's longest connected electric vehicle charging highways. EV drivers have access to 110 charging points in 49 locations on the WA EV Network, from Mundrabilla near the SA border, throughout the outback and along the coast, to Kununurra in the Kimberley. Conscious car owners can now explore Western Australia's dreamy landscape more sustainably with the assurance you can charge up when needed.

96

Skirt the coast on the Grand Pacific Drive

Stretching along the dramatic cliffs of the NSW South Coast from Sydney/Warrane's Royal National Park in the Sutherland Shire to the Shoalhaven region, the Grand Pacific Drive is one of Australia's most scenic routes, offering breathtaking vistas of the Pacific Ocean and rugged landscapes. Cruise the coast in an all-electric car, such as the sleek Porsche Macan, enjoying zero-emission travel as you pass through charming towns like Shellharbour and Milton. Stop to explore iconic landmarks, including the Sea Cliff Bridge and Kiama Blowhole, discovering idyllic beaches and hidden waterfalls along the way.





98

See Tassie's hidden gems by coach

AAT Kings has packed the very best of Tasmania/Lutruwita into one five-day coach trip along the state's east coast from Launceston to Hobart/Nipaluna. And the best part? You don't have to share the driving. Highlights include Cataract Gorge, the purple fields of Bridestowe Lavender Estate, a face-to-face encounter with a Tassie devil, plus a rolling hit list of the state's best towns and a walk to Wineglass Bay Lookout. The journey ends on a high with an optional lap around Australia's oldest lighthouse with Pennicott Wilderness Journeys.



99

Go with the flow on Waterfall Way

The scenic Waterfall Way winds for some 185 kilometres between Coffs Harbour and Armidale in NSW. Drop a few pins on your map app so you can stop and listen to the perpetual roar of the water tumbling down through trees, over rocks and into valleys. Wind through woodlands, rolling farmland and national parks to find wondrous waterfalls such as the not-to-be-missed Wollomombi Gorge. While you can cover the entire distance in about 2.5 hours, watching the churning waters send spumes skyward makes for a dramatic detour to your road trip.

Be bold on the Gibb River Road

The 660-kilometre Gibb River Road cuts through the belly of WA's Kimberley from Derby to Wyndham via epic spots such as El Questro (pictured). The remote 4WD trail was constructed in the 1960s to transport cattle stock and includes dirt tracks and river crossings. Drivers need to be prepared, as there are very few petrol stations.

But they also need to be armed with a sense of adventure to discover attractions such as ancient gorges, thundering waterfalls, sacred Aboriginal sites and rock art, sprawling outback cattle stations and a unique pioneering history. Expect to meet some fascinating local characters along the way. **AT**

100



WORDS: KATIE CARLIN (TASSIE BY COACH); CARLA GROSSETTI (WATERFALL WAY); MEGAN ARKINSTALL (GIBB RIVER ROAD); PHOTOGRAPHY: TOURISM TASMANIA (WINEGLASS BAY); TOURISM TASMANIA/LAURA HELLE (TASMANIAN DEVIL); DESTINATION NSW/PAT SURASEANG (CRYSTAL SHOWERS FALLS); GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK PHOTO/MACKENZIE SWEETNAM (EL QUESTRO STATION); TOURISM AUSTRALIA (BRIDESTOWE LAVENDER ESTATE)

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CULTURE

what's on · elliot routledge · state of the art · wanderlust · see you soon

IN THE ABSTRACT

Sydney/Warrane-based artist Elliott Routledge takes visual data from experience, feeling or physical objects and rearranges them into abstract portraits, murals and sculptures. His vibrant public pieces evoke joy and contemplation, such as Happy Place, an ephemeral artwork that was installed on Worimi Conservation Lands in NSW. Turn to page 156 for more.





< 25 JULY – 3 AUGUST

THE CURATED PLATE

SUNSHINE COAST, QLD

Savour the bounty of Queensland's food bowl at The Curated Plate, a series of 30 food-focused events designed to guide you through the paddock-to-plate journey. Over 10 delicious days, you'll meet the makers at local markets, tour farms growing the state's best produce and get hands-on at cooking classes. Exclusive dining experiences will also transform the region's bounty into dishes that will linger on the palate long after your plate has been cleared. thecuratedplate.com.au



30 MAY – 23 NOVEMBER

65,000 YEARS: A SHORT HISTORY OF AUSTRALIAN ART

MELBOURNE, VIC

After extensive refurbishments by Wood Marsh architecture studio, the Potter Museum of Art in Melbourne/Naarm is reopening its doors during National Reconciliation Week with headline exhibition 65,000 Years: A Short History of Australian Art. Curated in consultation with First Nations artists and custodians of art traditions, more than 450 works demonstrate the brilliance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists. Complementing the exhibition and comprehensively exploring the topic further, a hard-cover book featuring a 25-strong essay collection is available to purchase in the gift shop. potter-museum.unimelb.edu.au

5–6 JULY >

National Indigenous Art Fair

SYDNEY, NSW

Launching at the start of NAIDOC Week 2025, the National Indigenous Art Fair will again take over Sydney/Warrane's Overseas Passenger Terminal to platform Indigenous artists for its sixth year running. After browsing stalls touting everything from original paintings and textiles to jewellery and homewares, take part in an informative talk, demonstration, tasting or workshop. All proceeds go directly back into the remote communities, centres and artists in attendance. niaf.com.au



WHAT'S ON

From an exhibition celebrating TRAILBLAZING female artists to a dash across the DESERT, here's what's *WORTH* adding to your CALENDAR.



6–9 JUNE >

Finke Desert Race

ALICE SPRINGS, NT

Once a year, more than 500 cars, motorbikes, buggies and ATVs leave Alice Springs/Mparntwe to take on 460 kilometres of rugged off-road terrain across an unforgiving expanse of the Northern Territory. To cross the finish line in the remote community of Aputula two days later is to officially triumph in the Finke Desert Race. And while it may take weeks to rid your pores of the red dirt, you'll have experienced the outback like never before. finkedesertrace.com.au



13–15 JUNE

OpenField Arts Festival

BERRY, NSW

The biennial OpenField Arts Festival is back after a successful inauguration to the NSW South Coast town of Berry in 2023. This year, the multidisciplinary program is curated by Guringai Yuin artist Amanda Jane Reynolds to celebrate cultural diasporas and connection to Country through First Nations art and stories. Buildings across Berry will also be re-energised to offer fresh perspectives on place, belonging, land and community. openfield.com.au



< 17 MAY

BASSINTHEGRASS

DARWIN, NT

May marks the return of Darwin/Garramilla's biggest music event of the year, turning the peaceful, palm-lined shores of Mindil Beach into a playground for rhythm revellers. For its 22nd edition, BASSINTHEGRASS is bringing beats in abundance, with top acts including Hilltop Hoods, Meg Mac, The Jungle Giants and more turning up the heat. It'll also be the first year for BASS Camp, where families can retreat for kids' activities, karaoke, comfy seats and exclusive amenities. bassinthegrass.com.au

WHERE IT'S AT

Beyond the sand, sea and FOOD scene, TOWNSVILLE is turning into the new events CAPITAL of the Sunshine State.

Townsville is quickly making a name for itself as an events capital of Queensland. From global sporting events to celebrations of the arts, there's never been a better time to align your next tropical getaway with the unbeatable vibes of an event in this northern Queensland hub.

The yearly calendar is full, meaning there's an event for everyone. Discover the ones that are shaping up to be some of the biggest events in 2025.



2

Supercars NTI Townsville 500

11-13 JULY 2025

Sports fans will be pleased to know that Townsville boasts more than just the NRL's North Queensland Cowboys. Those facing the comedown of this year's Formula 1 can bounce back with the 2025 NTI Townsville 500.

Each year, the event draws motorsports enthusiasts from around the country as supercars take over the streets of Townsville. Off the race track, the weekend also promises plenty of car tricks and displays – think drifting, car builds and the MotorEx automotive expo – as well as live music, Australian Defence Force displays, freestyle motocross and more.



3

AUSTRALIAN FESTIVAL OF CHAMBER MUSIC

25 JULY – 2 AUGUST 2025

Clear your ears of the sounds of revving engines with one of the city's longest running events, the Australian Festival of Chamber Music (AFCM). Some of the world's most celebrated musicians head to Townsville to perform an impressive 30 concerts over nine days. The best part? It features exclusive shows that can only be experienced at the festival, like AFCM Concert Conversations, where visiting festival musicians share stories of their personal and professional lives.



1

NORTH AUSTRALIAN FESTIVAL OF ARTS

24 SEPTEMBER – 12 OCTOBER 2025

While sun, sea and sand might be the first images conjured up at a mention of Townsville, the tropical city is also gaining popularity as a cultural hub. Experience it at its best during the North Australian Festival of Arts.

The famous Strand in Townsville will be bursting with colour and sound – catch theatre, cabaret, dance, circus acts and so much more. Stop to listen to world-class live music and even get involved with interactive workshops.

SeaLink Magnetic Island Race Week

28 AUGUST – 3 SEPTEMBER 2025

Just 20 minutes from the city, koala-filled Magnetic Island is a must-do at any time of year. Align your trip with the annual SeaLink Magnetic Island Race Week to not only enjoy paradise, but also five days of tropical racing fun with a twist. Every August to September, experience live bands, parties, beach festivals, markets, long lunches and even mud crab races, all while taking in tropical island views.

Visit townsvillenorthqueensland.com.au

4





5-21 JUNE
Dark Mofo
HOBART, TAS

After a scaled-back program last year, Tasmanians are rejoicing at the full-throttle return of Dark Mofo festival this June. To atone, the winter solstice celebration is packing its program with events that range from the dazzling and divine to the downright disturbing. Cult-favourite rituals like the Winter Feast and Nude Solstice Swim are all on the cards, as well as live music, public exhibitions, performance art and more. darkmofo.net.au



27-29 JUNE
NINGALOO SKY FESTIVAL
EXMOUTH, WA

Delight in the raw beauty of WA's Coral Coast at Ningaloo Sky Festival, a celebration of the region's natural wonders. Held in the sleepy town of Exmouth, guests are invited to experience a melting pot of cultures, where traditional flavours meet local live music and astronomy talks share the stage with drone shows – all under the blanket of Ningaloo's breathtaking starscape. ningaloosky.com.au



UNTIL 20 JULY
FLORIBUNDA
MELBOURNE, VIC

In partnership with the National Gallery of Victoria, *Floribunda* is a bouquet of colour bestowed upon Bunjil Place Gallery in south-east Melbourne/Naarm. Dipping into different times, cultures and places, the exhibition documents the enduring influence of flowers on art through more than 150 paintings, photographs and objects curated by artist David Sequeira, who riffed on the concept of *wunderkammers*, or cabinets of curiosities – a decorative style born in 16th-century Europe. bunjilplace.com.au

< UNTIL 20 JULY
Blak Douglas: The Halfway Line
SYDNEY, NSW

Dhungatti artist and winner of the 2022 Archibald Prize, Blak Douglas brings his survey exhibition to the Penrith Regional Gallery in Sydney/Warrane's west, a body of work that spotlights his significant and enduring impact on Australia's art scene since the mid-1990s. *The Halfway Line* is the biggest presentation of Douglas's work to date, immortalising his ongoing campaign to platform the lived experiences and sociopolitical realities of Aboriginal Australians through graphic design, installations, paintings and portraiture. penrithregionalgallery.com.au



31 MAY – 21 SEPTEMBER
CÉZANNE TO GIACOMETTI
CANBERRA, ACT

In an Australian first, Berlin's Museum Berggruen is loaning more than 80 works of art to Canberra's National Gallery of Australia for Cézanne to Giacometti. The exclusive exhibition features paintings by some of the world's most revolutionary artists – from Cézanne and Giacometti to Matisse and Picasso – alongside pieces by Dorrit Black, Anne Dangar and more to highlight how Aussie artists were influenced by their European counterparts. nga.gov.au

24 MAY – 7 SEPTEMBER >
Dangerously Modern: Australian women artists in Europe 1890-1940
ADELAIDE, SA

Recognising the global importance of women's rights, the United Nations declared 1975 as International Women's Year. To mark its 50th anniversary, more than 200 works by 50 female Australian artists will decorate the walls of Adelaide/Tarntanya's Art Gallery of South Australia. From paintings and prints to sculpture and ceramics, this exhibition honours the impact these trailblazers had on the global story of modernism. agsa.sa.gov.au



PHOTOGRAPHY: SHIRE OF EXMOUTH (EXMOUTH); EDDY SUMMERS (PORTRAIT OF ARTIST BLAK DOUGLAS AND ARTWORK BLAK PANTHER); 2024. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND PENRITH REGIONAL GALLERY; ARTWORK: PABLO PICASSO, WOMAN IN A MULTICOLOURED HAT (TÊTE DE FEMME AU CHAPEAU); WAYNE TUNNICLIFFE, HEAD OF AUSTRALIAN ART, ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES; TRACEY LOCK, CURATOR OF AUSTRALIAN ART, ART GALLERY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA, AND ELLE FREAK, ASSOCIATE CURATOR OF AUSTRALIAN ART, NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA, MELBOURNE; WITH AN IMAGE OF GRACE CROWLEY, MISS GWEN RIDLEY, 1930. PHOTO SAUL STEED, ARTHUR STREETON ROSES C. 1929. NATIONAL GALLERY OF VICTORIA, MELBOURNE; FELTON BEQUEST, 1930.

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Hepburn Springs VIC

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT:
 Artist Elliott Routledge with his Eclectic
 Genetic artwork; Ti Tree Walk adds a
 splash of colour to the Melbourne Quarter;
 Never Too Late is emblazoned on a wall
 near Ashfield Station in Sydney/Warrane.

THE COMMON GOOD

Elliott Routledge's large-scale *MURALS* emblazoned on *BUILDINGS* around the world evoke JOY, ask questions and foster a sense of *COMMUNITY* spirit, writes Lara Picone.

IF YOU HAPPEN UPON Elliott Routledge painting one of his large-scale, joy-inducing murals in your street, he'll probably tell you he's not the artist, just the guy installing it. This is partly because he wants to hear your honest critique – free from the filter usually deployed when people know they're in conversation with the creator of the artwork.

"It's terrible, but I love it," says Routledge. "Painting outside is so different to [encountering art] in a gallery, where you're told what to think. On the streets everyone has an opinion and it's an unashamed, unfiltered opinion. Often it's good, often it's bad, but it's pretty fun."

Chances are you've had your own opinion about one of his bold, attention-snatching murals as you've carried on with your day. Perhaps while awaiting the train in Ashfield, in Sydney/Warrane, where he's painted an enormous *Never Too Late* piece on the side of an accountant's office (eliciting pithy commentary that it's never too late to file your tax return). Or wandering along Pitt and Park streets in the CBD, as his eight-storey *Here/Now* work reminds you of the temporal imperative of the human existence. Maybe you've walked by his *Hello* mural at Coomera's Westfield in Queensland? You'll even

find Routledge's works blaring brightly from the side of buildings as far-flung as Phnom Penh in Cambodia and the foreshore in San Diego, USA, where he's represented by Madison Gallery.

Spending days outside scaling facades is a meditative, if exposing, experience for Routledge, who has a natural compatibility with the altitude required of his work, but an uneasy relationship with the visibility it brings. As a self-confessed introvert, Routledge admits he sometimes wonders why he places himself in a position of creative scrutiny. But what he loves about public art is its accessibility and ability to unite communities.

"I like that it's outdoor, it's free. People can take ownership of the works and they become landmarks. In smaller communities, I've realised that's a big deal. An artwork tends to become part of the community, they become protective of it and it becomes theirs," says Routledge.

With the fragmented focus of a quick mind, Routledge can't idle in a single creative lane for too long. So in addition to murals, he paints canvases and creates public and small-scale sculptural works, often out of fibreglass or lightweight concrete.

An example of the latter is an ephemeral work titled *Happy Place*. This collaboration with alcoholic beverage brand Fellr and renowned travel photographer Matt Cherubino saw Routledge make and install a fairy floss-hued, totem-like sculpture in the shifting dunes of the Worimi Conservation Lands in NSW.

With blessings from Traditional Owners, the temporary work was designed and assembled in situ for the purpose of photography and





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Reflector is the first in a new series of shape paintings; Happy Place was an ephemeral artwork on Worimi Conservation Lands; A snapshot of the Noise, Sunset, Rush solo exhibition.



has a soothing, otherworldly presence amid the undulating sandscape. The dunes and sculpture appear almost as an ode to impermanence in Cherubino's striking shots.

"I tried to create something that would blend in with the space, but also feel like it's come from somewhere else," Routledge says. "It was important to have someone from the Worimi people take us around, because it's been their land forever and the knowledge is so vast. It's important as creatives, wherever you travel and create artworks, to be introduced to the land and have the blessing to do work there," he says.

Using both pop tones and primary colours with inferences to 1980s and '90s Acid House rave culture, Routledge's artworks touch on themes that have a pervasive sway on our collective internal dialogues, such as happiness being the ruling objective. With often unyieldingly sharp edges – in which Routledge perceives an early influence by Australian artist Jeffrey Smart – his works feel digestibly optimistic, but a hidden complexity dwells within.

"At face value, it's a nice smiley face. But also, it's talking about life and how life's not always perfect. A lot of my stuff probably has dark, morbid thoughts, but I just translate it a different way," says Routledge. "Happiness is ultimately the goal, and that's the balance that we find ourselves in day-to-day."

So, if you find yourself dwarfed by the cheerful saturation of a wall painted by Routledge, take it as a reminder that it's never too late to be happy in the here and now. But, you should probably still file that tax return. **AT**

Here and Now is on until July at Parkline Place, Level 1, cnr Pitt and Park streets, Sydney/Warrane. Blemish is on 5–19 June at Saint Cloche Gallery, 37 MacDonald Street, Paddington, Sydney. elliotttroutledge.com



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Jenny Kee and Linda Jackson put Australia on the fashion map through their collaborations; Jackson and Kee at abstract artist Sonia Delaunay's 1977 Paris exhibition; Delaunay's paintings at the current NGA exhibition; Experimental fashion pieces by the two Aussie designers are displayed alongside the artworks.



features Kee and Jackson's fashion pieces alongside and in conversation with Delaunay's paintings. "It's such an honour. It's extraordinary," says Jackson.

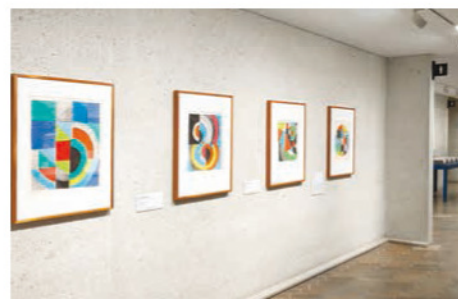
Sonia Delaunay co-founded the Orphism art movement in the early 20th century alongside her husband, Robert Delaunay. Orphism, a colourful and lyrical offshoot of Cubism, reinjected a sense of rhythm and dynamism into abstraction. Delaunay's approach, and the fact that she also made her own clothing, resonated deeply with Jackson, who had been painting and sewing from a young age.

"It's just amazing to discover someone like that," Jackson says. "[Delaunay] was inspired by colour, light, rhythm and movement and translated it in so many different ways. I feel similar because painting is what I love to do, as well as making clothes – being able to translate both those ways of working, whether through knitting, crocheting or appliqué."

Delaunay was one of the first modern artists to blur the line between fine art and design, applying the principles of Orphism not just to paintings but to textiles, fashion and interior design. Her signature approach, which she called *simultané*, was created through a contrasting of bold colours to make them 'sing'. It's a thread that continues into the colourful and idiosyncratic designs created by Kee and Jackson, credited with putting Australia on the fashion map in the 1970s.

"It was awesome to discover that [Delaunay] made her own clothes, and so did [artists like] Georgia O'Keeffe," says Jackson. "That's just part of what women artists did." With a combination of bright, abstract clothes and canvas, *Know My Name: Kee, Jackson and Delaunay* is a celebration of the creative legacy of three visionary and kindred women who have lived lives full of colour. 

Know My Name: Kee, Jackson and Delaunay is showing at Canberra's National Gallery of Australia until 17 October. The second part of the exhibition will run 1 November – July 2026. nga.gov.au



Life in colour

A retrospective exhibition UNITES two Aussie fashion DARLINGS with a trailblazing abstract artist to reveal how art moves beyond the canvas into all FACETS of life.



IT'S 1977 IN PARIS. French abstract artist Sonia Delaunay, aged 92, is at the end of an illustrious life and career. At the same time, two young Aussie designers – Linda Jackson and Jenny Kee – are attending a retrospective of Delaunay's work at the Musée National d'Art Moderne, dressed head to toe in colourful garments inspired by the very art movement she pioneered (pictured top right). It's a snapshot of creative lineage in motion – the passing of a visionary torch between generations. Though separated by continents and eras, Kee, Jackson and Delaunay are united as female rule-breakers in the art world – Delaunay, through her bold, abstract paintings; Kee and Jackson, through their avant-garde fashion collaborations that they sold out of Kee's iconic Sydney/Warrane shop, Flamingo Park.

The National Gallery of Australia's exhibition *Know My Name: Kee, Jackson and Delaunay* brings that moment in Paris back full circle, nearly half a century later. Part of the NGA's broader *Know My Name* initiative, which celebrates female artists and their impact on Australian culture, this exhibition

Catriona Rowntree

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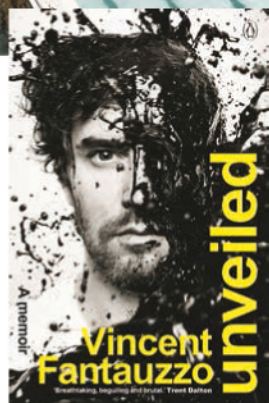
QLD Cairns, Caneland Central, Chermside, Garden City, Rockhampton

NSW Miranda, Penrith, Shellharbour SA Marion, Tea Tree Plaza, West Lakes



Vincent Fantauzzo

We chat to artist Vincent Fantauzzo about DREAM destinations, his namesake Brissie HOTEL and new memoir, *Unveiled*.



WHAT IS YOUR FIRST MEMORY OF TRAVELLING IN AUSTRALIA? I arrived in Australia at a very young age and I didn't really have the opportunity to travel at all until I was about 17. I was an amateur boxer, and I went to Tasmania to fight for an Australian title.

WHAT'S IT LIKE HAVING A HOTEL (CRYSTALBROOK VINCENT IN BRISBANE/MEANJIN) BASED ON YOUR WORK? It's very humbling to have the hotel (1) named after me, but also so fun. My partner [actor Asher Keddie] helped with the design. We went on the building site, helped design the rooms, the furniture, the lighting and all the artwork through the building.

IF YOU COULD LIVE ANYWHERE IN AUSTRALIA OTHER THAN MELBOURNE/NAARM, WHERE WOULD YOU LIVE? Definitely Sydney. I like that Sydney has a very international feel. It kind of ticks all the boxes with Bondi (2), the beaches, beautiful countryside, wineries and the Blue Mountains.

YOU'VE JUST OPENED FANTAUZZO GALLERY IN SOUTH YARRA. WHAT'S THE SPACE ABOUT? Downstairs is a gallery, upstairs is my studio and a bar. It's also an event space. I wanted to make an art space that is inviting and cool – some art spaces can feel a bit pretentious. I want somewhere where people can engage, have fun and feel free to ask questions.

WHAT'S ONE THING YOU'RE EXCITED TO SHARE WITH AUDIENCES IN YOUR NEW MEMOIR? A lot of my life, I've swept the difficult stuff under the rug and pretended it didn't happen. I thought if I share some of those difficult moments in *Unveiled* (3) then there might be a kid out there – like the kid I was – who will see that things can turn out great.

WHAT'S THE BEST PLACE IN AUSTRALIA FOR ARTS AND CULTURE? It has to be Melbourne (4). We have so much theatre and a lot of live music... I like the idea of a city that's accessible to everyone... you don't have to be 'invited', there's just always something happening. You'll find little jazz bars, small theatre shows or an exhibition down a laneway. It's very cool.

WHAT'S ONE DREAM DESTINATION IN AUSTRALIA YOU'RE DYING TO GET BACK TO? I'd love to take my kids to the Tiwi Islands (5). It's like *Jurassic Park* to me. You fly over the water in a chopper and you think you might see a shark. But you see 10. Then you see a shark chasing a crocodile, and then a dolphin, and a wild pig and a stingray. And this all happens within five minutes.

MY TRAVEL WARDROBE ALWAYS CONSISTS OF... I pretty much travel with hand luggage, so it's almost like I have a uniform. Black jeans, sneakers, a black T-shirt, and maybe a *Peaky Blinders*-style cap (6). It's very simple.

WHAT IS THE MOST MEMORABLE PLACE IN AUSTRALIA YOUR ART CAREER HAS TAKEN YOU? About 10 years ago, I did a project called *Last Contact* in the Central Desert. I worked with some Indigenous artists and it was just so eye-opening. There's amazing creativity and so many artists out there. 

Unveiled by Vincent Fantauzzo (Penguin, \$36.99) chronicles the artist's life, from street-fighting youth delinquent to one of Australia's most celebrated and successful portrait artists. penguin.com.au

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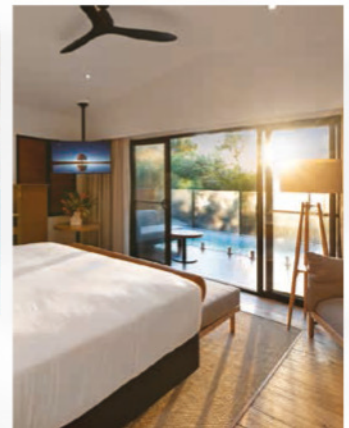
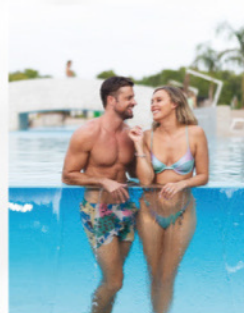
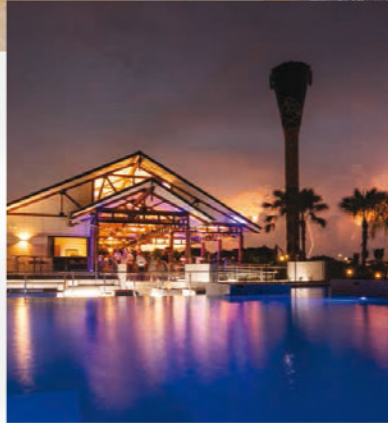
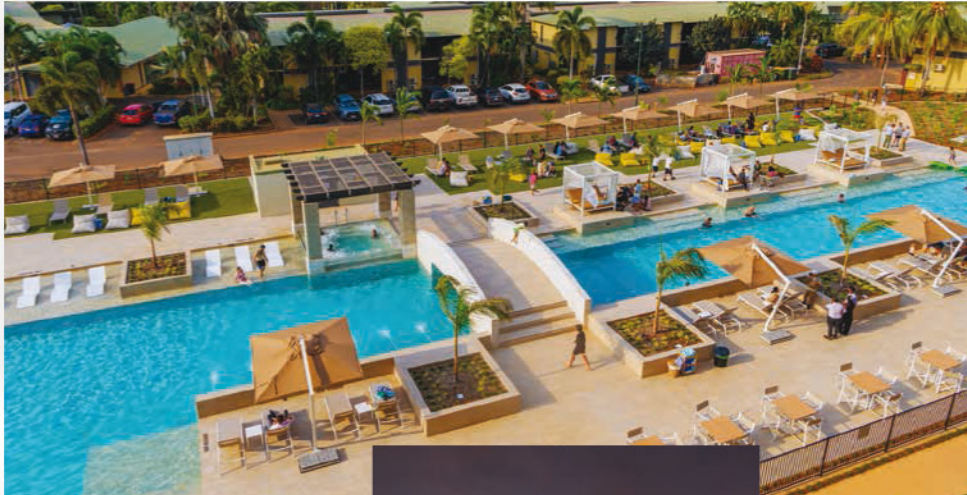
there's a road trip for everyone in this inspiring issue. Whether by 4WD, EV, campervan or even a coach tour, a road trip ensures you don't miss a thing along the way. Call dibs on the front seat, buckle up and hit the road with us. See you in August! **AT**



PHOTOGRAPHY: TOURISM AUSTRALIA ((MARGARET RIVER, WA)

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